TITTLEBAT TITMOUSE

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Tittlebat Titmouse

Abridged from

DR. SAMUEL WARREN'S

Famous Novel

Ten Thousand a Year

By

CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

With Many Curious and Diverting Illustrations by

WILL CRAWFORD

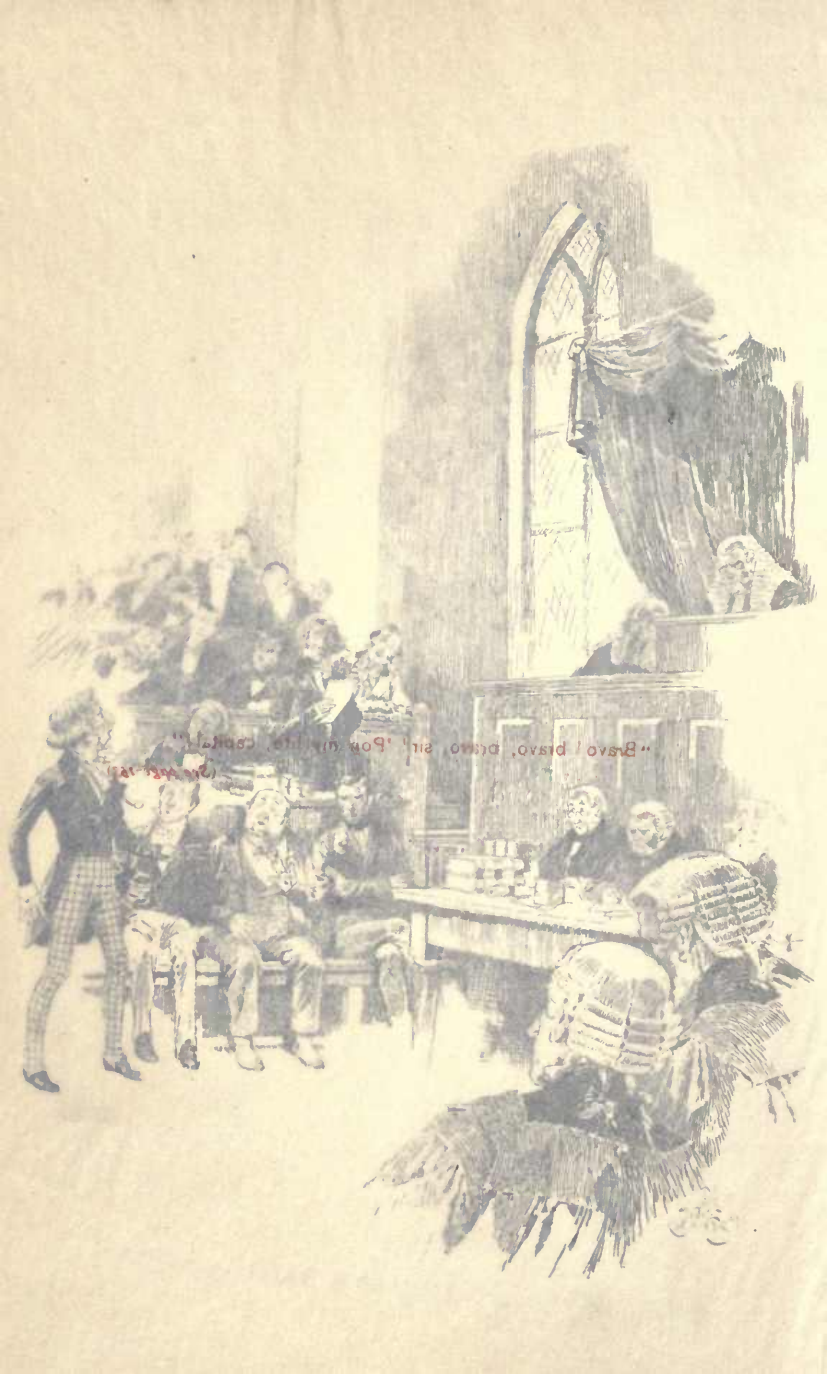
"Bravo! bravo, bravo, sir! 'Pon my life, capital!"

(See page 153)

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY

NEW YORK AND LONDON

1903



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A LETTER FROM

The Reverend E. Walpole Warren, D.D.

SON OF THE AUTHOR

VENICE, May 23, 1903.

MY DEAR DR. BRADY: — I have no objection to your doing as you have done, and am glad of the flattering suggestion that the work is sufficiently popular to deserve such treatment. So far as I am concerned, "Go on and prosper."

Wishing you all success in your undertaking, believe me,

Yours faithfully,

E. WALPOLE WARREN.

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INTRODUCTION

I FIRST read "Ten Thousand A Year" in my early youth. The impression it made upon me was a lasting one; and when I happened to re-read it last year I found that the pleasure it had given me before was enhanced by the second perusal. Yet there were many parts of the story which added little to the interest; in fact, which detracted from it. It was loaded with detail and clogged with sentiment; its course was halted by legal disquisitions and moral reflections which spun it out to an interminable length. It seemed to me it would be a more readable book, and therefore much more likely to regain a wide circulation among readers of the present, if it were stripped of its verbiage and reduced to something like reasonable limits.

I studied the matter and concluded to attempt an abridgment of the story. The result is in your hands. It is just what it purports to be, an abridgment. Few alterations have been made in the text; in fact, only such as were required to supply necessary connections, to preserve continuity, and, rarely, to explain in a word or two that to which the author had devoted a chapter or more. The original work was so full that there was little necessity even for this sort of alteration. I think that my additions, all told, would not form more than two pages of the book. Practically all that follows, therefore, is the author's own. Even his punctuation, paragraphing, etc., have been generally followed.

The book is a large one, even in its abridged condition. I presume that I have cut out two and one-half times as much matter as now appears. The size of the original can, therefore, be inferred. It was in truth a three-volume novel of the olden kind.

The characters which have given the story its persistent vogue are Tittlebat Titmouse and Oily Gammon. They are the protagonists of the tale. Nearly every scene in which

they appear has been preserved in the abridgment. The Aubreys, to whom the author was so much attached, have been sacrificed, with some regret, possibly, but without hesitation. Had it depended upon them the novel would scarcely have survived its serial publication. All the legal discussions have been omitted, save such as were necessary to the development of the romance. Much that was local, transitory, and uninteresting concerning Parliamentary elections, some of which was of a slightly polemical cast, has also been deleted. What remains tells the interesting story with sufficient detail and portrays the characters whose names were once as familiar on everybody's lips as household words—and who are even yet remembered.

What a series of characters they are! Titmouse himself, who has furnished a new title for the volume; Gammon, one of the most subtle and delectable scoundrels in literature; Quirk and Snap, his worthy partners; Mr. Tag-rag; his daughter Tabitha, and Miss Dora Quirk, both of whom sought in vain the honor of an alliance with the hero; Mr. Robert Huckaback, the ingenious friend; that delightful caricature of nobility to whom, in spite of his vanity and pomposity, one's heart goes out—the Earl of Dreddlington, Titmouse's noble kinsman, to whose daughter, the poor Lady Cecilia, that unworthy favorite of fortune was finally wedded. And there is much to be said of the minor characters, Mrs. Squallop, Gripe, Steggars, Yahoo, Fitz-Snooks, and the rest.

On the other side there are Aubrey; his weeping wife (singular what a tendency, half a century or more ago, people in high society, in contemporary novels at least, had to burst into tears!); the beauteous Kate, who fell as a blushing bride —also a weeping one!—into the arms of Mr. Delamere, while the good old Dr. Tatham, worthy clergyman of the past, blessed the union; Lord De la Zouch, the noble friend; Messrs. Parkinson and Runnington, the upright lawyers; the brilliant Attorney-General; and Messrs. Subtle, Quicksilver, and Lynch, *et al.*, who complete a category worthy of Dickens's brightest pages.

In preparing the abridgment I went over the story no less than six times. I still find it of absorbing interest. There are rich humor, true pathos, tender romance, and grim tragedy running through it all. Take, for instance, Titmouse's intro-

duction to Lord Dreddlington; his Parliamentary exertions; the great trial scene upon which the issue turns; the ruin of the Earl and the death of Gammon—there are not many books in our language in which such things are better done. It is easy to see why, in spite of all objections that can justly be made to the story as it was written, it is still read and admired, and editions of it are called for to-day.

The present publishers have done their work with admirable taste and generosity, and the delightful and artistic conceptions of Mr. Will Crawford, which accompany the text, enable those who will, not merely to read, but to see as well, the immortal figures of the famous tale.

It is a pleasure to me, too, to call attention to the approval of my undertaking by the possessor of the original MS. of the story, the son of the author, the Rev. Dr. E. Walpole Warren, of New York city.

A few biographical details concerning the writer of the romance may not be amiss:

Dr. Samuel Warren was born in Denbighshire in 1807, and died in London in 1877. He was the son of a clergyman, a man of much distinction in his profession. His education was mainly obtained at the University of Edinburgh, where his career was sufficiently distinguished to entitle him to the friendship of the famous Christopher North and a corresponding acquaintance, at least, with the great Sir Walter Scott. He was graduated in medicine at Edinburgh and thereafter studied law, being called to the bar in 1837. His familiarity with both professions is seen in his writings. He devoted himself, however, mainly to literature, and in later life to politics. He wrote a number of legal works of high repute and many sketches, tales, tracts, essays, and verses. One collection of stories, entitled "Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician," which first appeared serially in *Blackwood's Magazine*, is still republished from time to time. Another venture, called "Now and Then," was a failure and is forgotten. His chief fame, I might say his only permanent fame, rests upon "Ten Thousand A Year."

The first chapter of that story appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1839, where it met with immediate success. The complete book was published in three volumes in 1841

and had an enormous sale. It was translated into various languages, edition after edition was issued, and it is still on the market.

Some evidence of the esteem in which Dr. Warren was held by his contemporaries may be found in the fact that Oxford University honored him with the degree of D.C.L. at the same time with Macaulay, Lytton, Alison, and Aytoun. It is my fond hope that this abridgment, if it be thought fairly to represent him, may introduce him to a new generation, and, by adding thereby to the number of his readers, greatly increase his fame.

"I knew you would all like it, for it is most true to human nature and it cost me (though you may smile) a few tears while writing it. How I do love the Aubreys! How my heart yearns toward them!"

So Dr. Warren wrote to the editors of the magazine in which the story first appeared, with that naïve pride in his production which most of us feel in our own works, even if we are too discreet to express it. Ah, well, I cannot imagine that any one nowadays would shed tears over the Aubreys, even had he the patience to wade through all that was said about them originally. But of one thing I am certain; that is, that many a good laugh awaits the reader who follows the fortunes and misfortunes of Tittlebat Titmouse, and, perhaps, by that exchange he will be the gainer in the end.

CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY.

BROOKLYN, N. Y., June 10, 1903.

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CHAPTER I

IN WHICH THE HERO AND HIS FRIEND MR. HUCKABACK MAKE A STARTLING DISCOVERY IN THE "SUNDAY FLASH"

About ten o'clock one Sunday morning, the dazzling sunbeams irradiating a dismal back attic in one of the courts adjoining Oxford Street, London, at length awoke a young man lying in bed. He rubbed his eyes and yawned and stretched his limbs with a heavy sense of weariness. He presently cast his eyes on the clothes huddled together on the backless chair by the bedside, where he had hastily flung them about an hour after midnight; at which time he had returned after a long day's work from a great draper's shop in Oxford Street, where he served as a shopman. He could hardly keep his eyes open while he undressed, and on dropping exhausted into bed, he had continued in unbroken slumber till the moment at which he is presented to the reader.

Casting an irresolute glance toward the tiny fireplace, where lay a modicum of wood and coal, with a tinderbox and a match or two placed upon the hob, he stepped lazily out of bed, lit his fire, placed his bit of a kettle on the top of it, and returned to bed, where he lay, watching the crackling blaze insinuate itself through the wood and coal. While listlessly listening to the discordant jangling of innumerable church-bells, clamorously calling the citizens to their devotions, the current of his thoughts was as follows:

"Heigho!—Lud, Lud!—This is my only holiday, yet I don't seem to enjoy it! What a life mine is, to be sure! Here am I, in my eight-and-twentieth year, and for four long years I have been one of the shopmen at Tag-rag & Co.'s, slaving from half-past seven o'clock in the morning till nine at night, and all for a salary of £35 a year and my board! And Mr. Tag-rag—eugh! what a beast!—is always telling me how high he's raised my salary! 'Pon my soul! it can't

last; for sometimes I feel getting desperate!—Seven shillings a-week do I pay for this cursed hole that one couldn't swing a cat in! Curse me, say I, if this life is worth having! It's all the very vanity of vanities—as it's said somewhere in the Bible—and no mistake! Fag, fag, fag, all one's days, and—what for? Thirty-five pounds a year, and '*no advance!*' Everybody I see out is happy, excepting me!—Everybody laughs when they see me, and know that I'm only a tallow-faced counter-jumper—O Lord! what's the use of being good-looking, as some chaps say I am?" Here he passed his left hand through a profusion of sandy-colored hair, and cast an eye towards a bit of fractured looking-glass hanging against the wall that faithfully represented to him a by no means ugly set of features.

"Ah, by Jove! many and many's the fine gal I've done my best to attract the notice of, while I was serving her in the shop. There has been luck to many a chap like me, in the same line of speculation: look at Tom Tarnish—how he got Miss Twang, the rich piano-forte maker's daughter—and now he's cut the shop, and lives at Hackney, like a regular gentleman! Ah, that *was* a stroke! But somehow it hasn't answered with *me* yet—the gals don't take! How I have set my eyes, to be sure, and ogled them—all of them don't seem to dislike the thing—and sometimes they'll smile, in a sort of way that says I'm safe—but it's been no use yet, not a bit of it! Now, just for the fun of the thing, only suppose luck was to befall *me!* Say that somebody was to leave me lots of cash—many thousands a year, or something in that line! My stars! wouldn't I go it with the best of them! (Another long pause.) Gad, I really should hardly know how to begin to spend it! I think, by the way, I'd buy a title to set off with—for what won't money buy? Lord, only think how it would sound!—

'Sir Tittlebat Titmouse, Baronet;' or, 'Lord Titmouse.'

"The very first place I'd go to, after I'd got my title, should be—our cursed shop, to buy a dozen or two pair of white kid. What a flutter there would be among the poor pale devils standing behind the counters at Tag-rag & Co.'s when my carriage drew up, and I stepped, a tip-top

swell, into the shop. Tag-rag would come and attend to me himself. I shouldn't *quite* come Captain Stiff over him, I

"Lord, only think how it would sound!—'Lord Titmouse.'"

think; but I should treat him with a kind of an air, too, as if—hem! 'Pon my life! how delightful! Yes, I should often come to the shop. How they'd envy me! I wouldn't think of

marrying till—and yet I won't say either; if I got among some of them out and outers. Oh, of course, I might marry whom I pleased. Who couldn't be got with ten thousand a year? I should go abroad to Russia directly; for they tell me there's a man lives there who could dye this cussed hair of mine any color I liked—Egad! I'd come home as black as a crow, and hold up my head as high as any of them! While I was about it, I'd have a touch at my eyebrows."

Crash went all his castle-building at the sound of his tea-kettle, sputtering in the agonies of boiling over. Having placed it upon the hob, and put on the fire a tiny fragment of fresh coal, he began to make preparations for shaving, by pouring some of the hot water into an old tea-cup, which was presently to serve for the purpose of breakfast. He placed on the little mantelpiece a bit of crumpled whitey-brown paper, in which had been folded up a couple of cigars for the Sunday's enjoyment; drew his well-worn razor several times across the palm of his left hand; dipped his brush, worn within a third of an inch to the stump, into the hot water; presently passed it over so much of his face as he intended to shave; then rubbed on the damp surface a bit of yellow soap —and in less than five minutes Mr. Titmouse was a shaved man. Every hair of his spreading whiskers was sacred from the touch of steel; and a bushy crop of hair stretched underneath his chin, coming curled out on each side of it, above his stock, like two little horns, or tusks. An imperial and a pair of promising mustaches poor Mr. Titmouse had been compelled to sacrifice to the tyrannical whimsies of Mr. Tagrag, who imagined them to be not exactly suitable appendages for counter-jumpers.

This operation over, he took out of his trunk an old dirty-looking pomatum pot. A little of its contents he stroked carefully into his eye-brows; then, spreading some on the palms of his hands, he rubbed it vigorously into his stubborn hair and whiskers for some quarter of an hour; and then combed and brushed his hair into half-a-dozen different dispositions. Then he dipped the end of a towel into a little water, and, twisting it round his right fore-finger, passed it gently over his face, carefully avoiding his eye-brows and the hair at the top, sides, and bottom of his face, which he then wiped with a dry corner of the towel. Had he been able to

"see himself as others saw him," in respect of these neglected regions which lay somewhere behind and beneath his ears, possibly he might not have thought it superfluous to irrigate them with a little soap and water; but, after all, he knew best; it might have given him cold: and besides, his hair was very thick and long behind, and might perhaps conceal anything that was unsightly.

Then Mr. Titmouse, drawing from underneath the bed a bottle of blacking and a couple of brushes, with great labor and skill polished his boots up to a wonderful point of brilliancy. After washing his hands, he devoted a few moments to boiling about three teaspoonfuls of coffee, which was, in fact, *chicory*. Then he put on a calico shirt, with linen wristbands and collar, taking great care not to rumple a very showy front, containing three little rows of frills; in the middle one of which he stuck three "studs," connected together with two little gilt chains, coupled with a span-new satin stock, which he next buckled round his neck. Having put on his bright boots without any stockings, he carefully insinuated his legs into a pair of white trousers, which, with their short straps and high braces, were so tight that they would have burst if he should sit down hastily. The next thing he did was to attach a pair of spurs to his boots. Then he put on a kind of under-waistcoat, which was only a roll-collar of faded pea-green silk, designed to set off a very fine flowered damson-colored silk waistcoat, over which he drew a massive mosaic-gold chain (to purchase which he had sold a serviceable silver watch); then he drew his ring (those must have been sharp eyes which could tell, at a distance, and in a hurry, that it was not diamond) on the stumpy little finger of his red and thick right hand.

Then he sat down to his breakfast, spreading the shirt he had taken off upon his lap, to preserve his white trousers from spot or stain. He had no butter, having used the last on the preceding morning; so he was fain to put up with dry bread. Having swallowed two cups of his *quasi*-coffee, he resumed his toilet. Having smoothed out a few creases, he put on his blue surtout, with embossed silk buttons and velvet collar, and an outside pocket in the left breast; then he stood before the little vulgar fraction of a glass twitching about the collar, and sleeves, and front to make them sit well, conclu-

ding with a careful elongation of the wristbands of his shirt beyond his coat-sleeve—thus succeeding in producing a sort of white boundary-line between the blue of his coat-sleeve and the red of his hand. It was not a handsome hand, but broad and red, with thick and stumpy fingers, and very coarse, deep wrinkles at every joint. His nails were flat and shapeless; and he used to be continually gnawing them till he had succeeded in getting them down to the quick—and they were a sight to set one's teeth on edge. Then he extracted from his trunk a white pocket-handkerchief that had gone through four Sundays' show, not *use*, and yet was capable of exhibition again. A pair of sky-colored kid gloves next made their appearance. His Sunday hat was next gently removed from its box—ah, how lightly and delicately did he pass his smoothing hand round its glossy surface! Lastly, he took a thin black cane, with a gilt head, and full brown tassel—and his toilet was complete.

Laying down his cane, he passed his hands again through his hair, arranging it so as to fall nicely on each side beneath his hat, which he then placed upon his head, with an elegant inclination towards the left side. He was not bad looking. His forehead was contracted, and his eyes were of a very light color, and a trifle too protuberant; but his mouth was well-formed, and, being seldom closed, it exhibited very beautiful teeth; and his nose was of that description which generally passes for Roman. His countenance wore generally a smile, and was expressive of self-satisfaction. As for there being the slightest trace of *intellect* in it, I should be misleading the reader if I were to say anything of the sort. In height, he was about five feet and a quarter of an inch, *in his boots*, and he was rather strongly set, with a tendency to round shoulders; but his limbs were pliant, and his motions nimble.

Here you have, then, Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse to the life. Well—he put his hat on; buttoned the lowest two buttons of his surtout, and stuck his white pocket handkerchief into the outside pocket in front, anxiously disposing it so as to let a little of it appear above the edge of the pocket, with a sort of careful carelessness—a graceful contrast to the blue; drew on his gloves, took his cane in his hand, and, the sun shining in the full splendor of a July noon, and promising a glorious day, sallied forth to conquer! Petty finery without; a pinched

and stinted stomach within; a case of Back *versus* Belly, the plaintiff winning in a canter! Descending the narrow staircase, he heard exclaimed from an opposite window, "My eyes! *a'n't* that a swell!" He felt how true the observation was, so he hurried on and soon reached Oxford street.

Mr. Titmouse there walked along leisurely; for haste and perspiration were vulgar, and he had the day before him. He had no particular object in view. A tiff over-night with two of his shopmates had broken off a party to go that day to Greenwich; and this trifling circumstance had a little soured his temper. He resolved to-day to walk straight on, and dine somewhere out of town, by way of passing the time till four o'clock, at which hour he intended to make his appearance in Hyde Park, "to see the swells and the fashions," his favorite Sunday occupation.

No one could have judged from his dressy appearance, the constant smirk on his face, and his confident air, how very miserable that poor little dandy was; but three-fourths of his misery was occasioned by the impossibility he felt of ever being able to indulge in his propensities for finery and display. Nothing better had he to occupy his few thoughts. He had had only a plain mercantile education, *i.e.*, reading, writing, and arithmetic: beyond a very moderate acquaintance with these, he knew nothing whatever, not having read more than a few novels, and plays, and sporting newspapers. Deplorable, however, as were his circumstances, he often conceived the possibility of some unexpected and accidental change for the better: he had heard and read of extraordinary cases of luck. Why might he not be one of the lucky? A rich girl might fall in love with him; or some one might leave him money; or he might win a prize in the lottery—all these modes of getting enriched, frequently occurred to Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse; but he never once thought of one thing as conducing to such a result, viz., determined, unwearying industry and perseverance in the way of his business.

He pursued his way a mile or two beyond Bayswater, and came at length upon a nice little public house on the roadside. Tired tho he was, he first relieved his clothes and boots from the heavy dust upon them. Then he satisfied his hunger with a mutton-pie and a pint of porter. This fare, together with a penny to the little girl who waited on him,

cost him tenpence. Having lit one of his two cigars he started back to town, puffing along with an air of quiet enjoyment.

He approached Cumberland Gate about half-past five, when the Park might be said to be at its acme of fashion, as far as that could be indicated by a sluggish stream of carriages, three and four abreast—coroneted panels in abundance—by noble and well-known equestrians of both sexes, in troops, and by some thousand pedestrians of the same description.

What an enchanted ground!—How delicious this soft crush and flutter of aristocracy! Poor Titmouse felt a withering consciousness of his utter insignificance, yet he stepped along with a tolerably assured air, looking everybody he met straight in the face, and occasionally twirling about his little cane with an air which seemed to say—"Whatever opinion *you* may form of me, I have a very good opinion of myself." Indeed, what was the real difference between Count Do-'em-all and Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse? Only that the Count owed more money than Mr. Titmouse's creditors could be persuaded to allow *him* to owe! Leaning against the railing in a studied attitude, and eying wistfully each gay and fashionable equipage, with its often lovely and sometimes haughty enclosure, as it rolled slowly past him, Mr. Titmouse became more and more convinced of a great practical truth, viz., that the only real distinction between mankind was that effected by money. Want of money alone had placed him in his present abject position.

He looked and sighed in a kind of agony of vain longing. While his only day in the week for breathing fresh air and appearing like a gentleman in the world was rapidly drawing to a close, and he was beginning to think of returning to the dog-hole he had crawled out of in the morning, and to the shop for the rest of the week, the great and gay and happy folk he was looking at were thinking of driving home to dress for their grand dinners, and to lay out every kind of fine amusement for the ensuing week, and that was the sort of life they led every day in the week.

"Why," thought he, "am *I* thus spited by Fortune? The only thing she's given *me* is—nothing!—*D—n* everything!" exclaimed Mr. Titmouse aloud, at last starting off dejectedly on his aimless ramble. Mr. Titmouse walked along Picca-

dilly with a truly chop-fallen and disconsolate air. Dress as he would, no one seemed to care a curse for him. What to do with himself till it was time to return to his cheerless lodgings he did not exactly know; so he loitered along at a snail's pace till he struck into Leicester Square, where, hurrying up to a crowd at the further end, he found a man preaching with infinite energy. Mr. Titmouse looked on and listened for two or three minutes with apparent interest; and then, with a countenance in which pity struggled with contempt, muttered, loud enough to be heard by all near him, "poor devil!" and walked off. It occurred to him that a friend—one Robert Huckaback, much such another one as himself—lived in the neighborhood. He determined to take the chances of his being at home, and if so, of spending the remainder of the evening with him. Huckaback's quarters were in the same ambitious proximity to heaven as his own, the only difference being that they were a trifle cheaper and larger. He answered the door himself, having only the moment before returned from *his* Sunday excursion. He ordered in a glass of negus from the adjoining public-house, after some discussion, which ended in an agreement that he should stand treat that night, and Titmouse on the ensuing Sunday night. As soon as the negus arrived, accompanied by two sea-biscuits, the candle was lit; Huckaback handed a cigar to his friend, and both began to puff away.

"Anything stirring in to-day's *Flash*?" inquired Titmouse, as his eye caught sight of a copy of that able and interesting Sunday newspaper, the *Sunday Flash*, which Huckaback had hired for the evening from the news-shop on the ground-floor of his lodgings.

Mr. Huckaback rose and got the paper from the top of the drawers.

"Here's a mark of a beastly porter-pot that's been set upon it, by all that's holy! It's been at the public-house! Too bad of Mrs. Coggs to send it up to me in this state!" said he, handling it as tho its touch were contamination. "Faugh! how it stinks!"

"What a horrid beast she must be!" exclaimed Titmouse. "But, since better can't be had, let's hear what news is in it. Demmee! it's the only paper published, in my opinion, that's worth reading! Any fights a—stirring?"

"Haven't come to them yet; give a man *time*, Titty!" replied Huckaback, fixing his feet on another chair, and drawing the candle closer to the paper.

"But come, Huck," said Titmouse, as his friend continued his inspection of the paper, "you can't be reading both of those two sheets at once—give us the other sheet, and set the candle right betwixt us!—Come, fair's the word!"

Huckaback, thus appealed to, did as his friend requested; and the two gentlemen read and smoked for some minutes in silence.

"Well—I shall spell over the advertisements now," said Titmouse; "I've read everything else. One *may* hear of a prime situation, you know—and I'm quite sick of Tag-rag!"

Another interval of silence ensued. Titmouse having glanced listlessly over the advertisements, suddenly started in his chair, turned very pale, and stammered—

"Hollo! hollo, Hucky!—Why——"

"What's the matter, Tit?—eh?" inquired Huckaback, greatly astonished.

For a moment Titmouse made no answer, but, dropping his cigar, fixed his eyes intently on the paper, which began to rustle in his trembling hands. What occasioned this outbreak, with its subsequent agitation, was the following advertisement:

"NEXT OF KIN—Important.—The next of kin, if any such there be, of GABRIEL TITTLEBAT TITMOUSE, formerly of WHITEHAVEN, cordwainer, and who died somewhere about the year 1793, in London, may hear of something of the GREATEST POSSIBLE IMPORTANCE to himself, or herself, or themselves, by immediately communicating with Messrs. QUIRK, GAMMON & SNAP, Solicitors, Saffron Hill. No time is to be lost. 9th July, 18—. *The third advertisement.*"

"Read it up, Huck!" said he, handing the paper to his friend.

Huckaback read it aloud.

"It sounds like something, don't it?" inquired Titmouse tremulously, his color a little returning.

"Uncommon!—If this isn't *something*, then there's nothing in anything any more!" replied Huckaback solemnly.

"No!—'Pon my soul! but do you really think so?"

"I do, by jingo!—What a go it is!"

"What *is* in the wind, I wonder!" muttered Titmouse. "Who knows—hem!——" he paused, and once more read over the paragraph.—"It can't—no, curse me, it *can't be*——"

"*What* can't be, Tit?" interrupted Huckaback.

"Why, I've been thinking—it can't be a cursed hoax of the chaps at Tag-rag's?"

"Bo!—Is there any of 'em flush enough of money to do the thing? And how should they think it would ever come to be seen by you?—Then, there isn't a chap among them that could compose a piece like that."

"Ah! I don't know," said Titmouse doubtfully. "But—honor!—do you really now think there's anything in it?"

"I do—hanged if I don't, Tit!"

"Give me your hand, Hucky," shouted Titmouse, jumping up, and dancing about in a wild ecstasy, almost breathless. "If I *am* a made man—you see, Huck!—if I don't give you the handsomest breastpin you ever saw! No paste! real diamond!—Hurrah! I will, by jingo!"

Huckaback grasped his hand. "We've always been friends, Tit—haven't we?" said he.

"My room won't hold me to-night!" continued Titmouse. "I feel as if I was swelling all over. I'll walk the streets all night: I couldn't sleep a wink for the life of me. I'll walk about till the shop opens. Confound the shop, and Tag-rag, and everything and everybody in it! Thirty-five pounds a-year! See if I won't spend as much in cigars the first month!"

"Cigars! Is that your go? Now, *I* should take lessons in boxing, to begin with. It's a deuced high thing, you may depend upon it, and you can't be fit company for swells without it, Tit! You can't, by Jove!"

"Whatever you like, whatever you like, Hucky!" cried Titmouse adding, in a sort of ecstasy, "I'm sorry to say it, but how *precious* lucky that my father and mother's dead, and that I'm an only child!" Here he took such a sudden leap, that he split his trousers very awkwardly, and that sobered him for a moment, while they made arrangements for cobbling it up with a needle and thread which Huckaback always had by him.

"We're rather jumping in the dark a-bit, aren't we, Tit?" inquired Huckaback, while his companion was repairing the breach. "Let's look what it all means—here it is." He read it all aloud again—"'*greatest possible importance*'—what *can it* mean?"

"What! in a newspaper? Lord, Hucky! how many Titmouses would start up on all sides, if there isn't some already. I wonder what '*greatest possible importance*' can mean, now!"

"Some one's left you an awful lot of money, of course."

"It's too good to be true——"

"Or you may have made a *smite;* you a'n't such a bad-looking fellow, when you're dressed as you are now—you a'n't indeed, Titty!" Mr. Titmouse was quite flustered with the mere supposition, and also looked as sheepish as his features would admit of.

"E-e-e-eh, Hucky! how ve-ry silly you are!" he simpered.

"Or you may be found out heir to some great property, and all that kind of thing. But when do you intend to go to Messrs. What's-their-name? I say, the sooner the better. Why shouldn't we go to these gents now? Ah, here they are."

"I wonder if they're great men? Did you ever hear of them before?"

"Haven't I! Their names is always in this same paper; they are every day getting people off out of all kinds of scrapes—they're the chaps *I* should nat'rally go to if I anyhow got wrong—ahem!"

"But, my dear fellow—*Saffron Hill!*—Low, that—devilish low, 'pon my soul! Never was near it in my life."

"But they live there to be near the thieves. Lud, the thieves couldn't do without 'em! But what's that to you? Isn't it enough for *you*, Tit, if they can make good their advertisement? Let's off, Tit; for you mayn't be able to get there to-morrow—your employers——"

"My employers! Do you think, Hucky, I'm going back to business after this?"

"Come, come, Titty—not so fast—suppose it all turns out moonshine, after all?" quoth Huckaback, seriously.

"Lord, but I *won't* suppose it! It makes me sick to think of nothing coming of it!—Let's go off at once, and see what's to be done!"

So Huckaback put the newspaper in his pocket, blew out the candle, and the two started on their important errand. In due time they reached the residence of which they were in search. It was a large house, infinitely superior to all its dingy neighbors; and on a bright brass plate stood the awe-inspiring words, "Quirk, Gammon & Snap, Solicitors."

"Now, Tit," whispered Huckaback, "ring away! Faint heart never wins!"

"Well, it *must* be done; so—here goes!" In a very few moments they heard some one undoing the fastenings of the door, and a little old woman stood before them, candle in hand.

"Who are you?" she exclaimed, crustily.

"Is this Messrs.—what is it, Huck?—Oh! Messrs. Quirk & Co.'s?" inquired Titmouse, tapping the end of his cane against his chin, with a desperate effort to appear at his ease.

"Why, where are your eyes? I should think you might have seen what was wrote on this here plate—it's large enough! What's your business?"

"We want—Give us the paper, Hucky"—he added, addressing his companion, who produced it in a moment; and Titmouse would have proceeded to possess the old woman of all his little heart, when she cut him short by saying, snappishly—"They aren't none on 'em in; nor never is on Sundays—so you'll just call to-morrow if you wants 'em."

The friends consulted for a moment, and then Titmouse asked if he might go in and write a letter to Messrs. Quirk.

"No indeed!" said she; "how do I know who you are? There's a public-house close by, where you may write what you like, and bring it here, and they'll get it the first thing in the morning." With which the old janitrix shut the door in their faces.

"Huck, 'pon my life, I am afraid there's nothing in it," said Titmouse, despondingly, to his friend.

"Oudacious old toad!" muttered Huckaback indignantly.

"Hucky—I'm *sure* there's nothing in it!" exclaimed Titmouse after a long pause, looking earnestly at his friend, hoping to draw from him a contrary opinion.

"I—I own I don't half like the looks of it," replied Huckaback, putting his newspaper into his pocket again; "but we'll try if we can't write a letter to sound 'em, and so far take the old creature's advice. Here's the public-house. Come, let's see what's to be done."

Titmouse, greatly depressed, followed his friend; and they soon provided themselves with implements for writing. The following epistle was their joint composition:

"*To Messers.* QUIRK, GAMMON AND SNAP.

"Sir,—Your Names being Put In a Advertisement in This present *Sunday Flash*, Newspaper of To-day's Date, Mr. T. T. Begs To inform Your respectable House I feel Uncommon anxious To speak with them On This *truly interesting subject*, seeing It mentions The Name Of Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse, which Two last Names Of That Deceased Person *my Own name is*, which can *Any* Day (As soon As Possible) call and *prove* To you, By telling you The Same, *truly*. He being Engaged in Business During the week Very close, (for

The Present,) I hope that If they Have Any thing particular To say To Him, they will write To me without The least Delay, and please address T. T. at Tag-rag and Co.'s, No. 375, Oxford Street, Post-Paid, which will ensure Its Being duly Taken In By my Employers, and am,

"Gents,

"Yours to Command,

"TITTLEBAT TITMOUSE."

"P. S. My friend, that Is With me writing This (Mr. Robert Huckaback,) can prove who I am If necessitated so to do.

"N. B. Shall have no objections to do the Liberal Thing if anything suitable Turns Up Of It.

T. T.

"Forgot to Say, am The only Child of my Honored Parents, one of which (my Mother) Died; before I knew them In Lawful Wedloc, and Was 27 last Birth Day, Never having Seen your Advertisement Till This Night, wh, if Necessary *can Prove*."

This perspicuous and truly elegant performance having been thrice subjected to the critical examination of the friends (the paragraph concerning Huckaback having been inserted at the instance of that gentleman), was then safely deposited with the old woman of the house; and then the two West-End gentlemen hastened away from that truly plebeian part of the town.

CHAPTER II

WHEREIN THE HERO MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF MR. OILY GAMMON, AND INCURS THE ENMITY OF MR. THOMAS TAG-RAG

NOTHING transpired, the next morning, alas! to vary the monotonous duties of the shop. Every other minute Titmouse cast a feverish glance toward the door. He almost dropped at one time, as a postman crossed from the opposite side of the street as if to enter their shop—passing on immediately, however, to the next door. Not a person, in short, entered the premises that he did not scrutinize narrowly and anxiously, but in vain. No—buying and selling was the order of the day, as usual! Eleven o'clock struck, and at that moment a voice called out to him from near the door—"Titmouse! Wanted!"

"Coming!" he shouted, turning as white as the cambric he held in his hands.

The stranger who had inquired for him was of a slight gentlemanly figure, above the average height. His countenance was very striking. He was dressed with simplicity—somewhat carelessly perhaps, and appeared somewhere about thirty-six or thirty-seven years of age. He bowed slightly as Titmouse approached him, and an air of very serious surprise came over his expressive countenance.

"Mr. Titmouse?" he inquired, blandly.

"Ye-e-s, sir, at your service," replied Titmouse, trembling involuntarily all over.

"You favored us by leaving a note at our office last night?" he inquired; lowering his voice to a whisper.

"Yes, sir, hoping it was no——"

"Pray, Mr. Titmouse, can we be alone for about five or ten minutes?"

"I—I—don't exactly know, *here*, sir; I'm afraid—against the rules of the house—but—I'll ask. Here is Mr. Tag-rag.—

May I step into the cloak-room with this gentleman for a few minutes, sir?" he continued, addressing his imperious employer, who had followed Titmouse and stood at a yard or two's distance, eying the two with a fussy dissatisfied look.

Mr. Tag-rag was about fifty-two years old; a tyrant in his little way; a compound of ignorance, selfishness, and conceit. He knew nothing on earth except the price of his goods, and how to make the most of his business. He was of middle size, with a tendency to corpulence. He had a dull, gray eye, with white eyelashes, and no eyebrows; a forehead that seemed ashamed of his face, it retreated so far and so abruptly back from it; his face was pretty deeply pitted with the smallpox; his nose consisted of two great nostrils looking at you impudently out of the middle of his face; his closely cut whiskers came in points to each corner of his mouth, which was large, shapeless, and sensual-looking.

"You know quite well, sir, we never allow anything of the sort," was his short reply, in a very disagreeable tone and manner, to the modest request of Titmouse.

"May I beg the favor of a few minutes' private conversation with Mr. Titmouse," said the stranger, politely, "on matter of importance to him? My name, sir, is Gammon, and I am a solicitor."

"Why, sir," answered Tag-rag, somewhat cowed by the decisive manner of Mr. Gammon, "it's really decidedly against the rules of the house, but—I suppose—what must be must be. I'll give him ten minutes—and he'd better not stay longer," he subjoined fiercely—looking significantly at Titmouse. "It's only for the sake of the other young men, sir. In a large establishment like ours, we're obliged, you know, sir," he added. Mr. Gammon, with a slight bow and a sarcastic smile, presently quitted the shop, accompanied by Titmouse.

In less than two minutes, Mr. Gammon was sitting at Titmouse's little rickety round table, at his lodgings, asking him a number of questions concerning his birth and family connections, and taking down his answers very carefully. Mr. Titmouse was surprised at the gentleman's knowledge of the family history of the Titmouses. As for papers, etc., Mr. Titmouse succeeded in producing four or five old letters and memoranda and one or two entries on the fly-leaf of a

Bible of his father's. With these documents Mr. Gammon was so much struck that he proposed to take them away with him for better and more leisurely examination and safer custody, at their office; but Mr. Titmouse hinted at his very recent acquaintance with Mr. Gammon, who, he

"He'd better not stay longer."

intimated, was at liberty to make exact copies of them, in his presence.

"Oh, certainly—yes," replied Mr. Gammon, slightly coloring at the distrust implied by this observation; "I applaud your caution, Mr. Titmouse. By all means keep them, and

most carefully; because it is quite possible that they may become rather valuable—to *you*."

"Thank you, sir; and now," said Titmouse, "I should most uncommonly like to know what all this means?"

"The law, my dear sir, is proverbially uncertain——"

"Oh, Lord! but the law can give me a *hint*——"

"*The law never hints*," interrupted Mr. Gammon impressively, with a bland smile.

"Well, then, how did you come, sir, to know that there ever was such a person as Mr. Gabriel Titmouse, my father? And what can come from him, seeing he was only a bit of a shoemaker—unless he's *heir* to something?"

"Why, you see, Mr. Titmouse," said Gammon, with an agreeable smile—(it was that smile of his that had been the making of Mr. Gammon)—"your curiosity is perfectly reasonable, and your frankness very obliging; and I see no difficulty in admitting at once, that *I have* had a motive——"

"Yes, sir—and all that—*I* know, sir," interrupted Titmouse, without disturbing the placid speaker.

"And that we waited with some anxiety for the result of our advertisement."

"Ah, you can't escape from *that*, you know, sir!" interposed Titmouse, with a confident air.

"But it is a maxim with us, my dear sir, never to be premature in anything, especially when it may be—very prejudicial; and in the present stage of the business I really do see it necessary not to—do anything premature and without consulting my partners."

"Lord, sir!" exclaimed Titmouse, getting more and more irritated and impatient as he reflected on the length of his absence from Tag-rag & Co.'s. "Is it money that's been left to me—or—anything of that sort? Not meaning it rudely, sir—please tell me at once, plainly, am I to be the better for anything you're now about?"

"That may or may not be, sir," answered Mr. Gammon, in the same imperturbable manner, drawing on his gloves, and rising from his chair. "In justice to yourself, and other parties concerned——"

"Oh! is anybody to *share* in it?" exclaimed Titmouse, alarmedly.

"I am sure," said Gammon, smiling, "that you will give us

credit for consulting your best interests. We sincerely desire to advance them; and this matter occupies a good deal of our time and anxiety. It—it is *really*," looking at his watch, "upward of an hour since we quitted your place of business—I fear I shall get into disgrace with that respectable gentleman your employer. Will you favor us with a call at our office to-morrow night, when the business of the day is over? When do you quit at night?"

"About half-past nine o'clock, sir; but couldn't I come to-night, sir?"

"Not to-night, my dear sir. We have an engagement. Let us say to-morrow night at a quarter past ten."

"Well, sir, I'll be with you. But I *must* say——"

"Good-day, Mr. Titmouse." They were by this time in Oxford Street again. "Good-day, my dear sir—to-morrow night, as soon after ten as posible—eh? Good-by."

This was all that Titmouse could get out of Mr. Gammon, who, hailing a coach off the stand beside them, got into it, and was soon making his way eastward. Titmouse felt very much like a squeezed orange; he had told everything he knew about himself and got nothing in return out of the smooth, imperturbable, impenetrable Mr. Gammon but empty civilities. "Lord, Lord!" thought Titmouse, as Mr. Gammon's coach turned the corner, "what would I give to know half about it that that gent knows! But Mr. Tag-rag! by Jove! what *will* he say? I've been more than an hour away—and he gave me ten minutes! Sha'n't I catch it?"

And he did. Almost the very first person he met, on entering the shop, was Mr. Tag-rag, who motioned the trembling Titmouse to follow him to the further end of the long shop, where there happened to be no customer.

"Is this your ten minutes, sir, eh?"

"I am sorry——"

"Where may you have been, sir, all this while?"

"With that gentleman, sir, and I really did not know——"

"You didn't know, sir! Who cares what you know, or don't know! You know you ought to have been back fifty-five minutes ago, sir. You do, sir. Isn't your time my property, sir? Don't I pay for it, sir? An hour!—in the middle of the day! I have not had such a thing happen this five years! I'll stop it out of your salary, sir."

Titmouse did not attempt to interrupt him.

"And pray what have you been gossiping about, sir, in this disgraceful manner?"

"Something that he wanted to say to me, sir."

"You low puppy!—do you suppose I don't see your impertinence? I *insist*, sir, on knowing what all this gossiping with that fellow has been about?"

"Then you *won't* know, that's flat!" replied Titmouse doggedly; returning to his usual station behind the counter.

"I sha'n't?"

"No, sir; you sha'n't know a single word about it."

"Sha'n't know a single word about it! Vastly good, sir!—Do you know whom you're talking to, sir? Do you really know in whose presence you are, sir!"

"Mr. Tag-rag, I presume, of the firm of Tag-rag & Co.," replied Titmouse, looking him full in the face. One or two of his companions near him almost turned pale at the audacity he was displaying.

"And who are *you*, sir, that dare to presume to bandy words with me, sir?" inquired Tag-rag, his deeply pitted face having gone quite white and his whole body quivering with rage.

"Tittlebat Titmouse, at your service," was the answer in a glib tone and with a sufficiently saucy air.

"You heard that, I hope?" inquired Tag-rag, with forced calmness, of a pale-faced young man, the nearest to him.

"Ye—es, sir," was the meekly reluctant answer.

"This day month you leave, sir!" said Mr. Tag-rag solemnly—as if conscious that he was passing a sort of sentence of death upon the presumptuous delinquent.

"Very well, Mr. Tag-rag—anything that pleases you pleases your humble servant. I *will* go this day month, and welcome—I've long wished——"

"Then you *sha'n't* leave, sir," said Tag-rag, furiously.

"But I will, sir. You've given me warning; and if you haven't, now I give you warning," replied Titmouse; turning, however, very pale, and experiencing a certain sudden sinking of the heart—for this was a serious and most unlooked-for event, and for a while put out of his head all the agitating thoughts of the last few hours. Poor Titmouse had enough to bear—what with the delicate raillery and banter of his accomplished companions for the rest of the day, and the galling tyranny of Mr. Tag-rag, and the state of miserable suspense in which Mr. Gammon had left him.

CHAPTER III

DESCRIBES THE OPENING OF A DAZZLING POSSIBILITY BEFORE THE HERO'S VISION BY MESSRS. QUIRK, GAMMON, AND SNAP

A FEW minutes after ten o'clock the following night, a gentle ringing at the bell of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's office announced the arrival of poor Titmouse. The door was quickly opened by a clerk.

"Ah—Mr. Titmouse, I presume?" he inquired.

"The same, sir—Tittlebat Titmouse."

"Oh! allow me, sir, to show you in." With this he led the way to an inner room. Three gentlemen were sitting at a large table, on which were lying a great number of papers and parchments. They rose when he entered, Mr. Quirk and Mr. Snap involuntarily starting on first catching sight of the figure of Titmouse; Mr. Gammon came and shook hands with him.

"Mr. Titmouse," said he, with a very polite air, "let me introduce you to Mr. Quirk"—(This was the senior partner, a short, stout, elderly gentleman, dressed in black, with a shining bald head and white hair and sharp black eyes, and who looked very earnestly, nay, with even a kind of dismay, at him)—"and Mr. Snap"—(This was the junior partner; he was about thirty, particularly well dressed, slight, active, and with a face like a terrier—hard, sharp, and wiry!) Mr. Gammon appeared altogether a different style of person from his partners. He was of most gentlemanly person and bearing—and at once acute, cautious, and insinuating—with a certain something about the eye which made Titmouse feel uneasy on looking at him.

"A seat, sir," said Mr. Quirk, placing a chair for him.

"You are punctual, Mr. Titmouse!" exclaimed Mr. Gammon, with a smile. "Pray what did that worthy Mr. Rag-bag —or whatever his name is—say, on your return?"

"Say, gents?" (he tried to clear his throat, for he spoke somewhat more thickly, and his heart beat more perceptibly than usual)—"Meaning no offense—I'm ruined by it, and no mistake."

"Ruined! I'm sorry to hear it," said Mr. Gammon.

"I am, indeed, sir. He's given me warning to go on the 10th of next month."

"Dear me, Mr. Titmouse!—Did he allege any reason for dismissing you?" keenly inquired Mr. Quirk.

"Yes, sir. Stopping out longer than I was allowed, and refusing to tell him what we had been talking about."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Quirk and Mr. Gammon—but such a laugh!—not careless or hearty, but subdued, and with a dash of deference in it. "Well—it perhaps may not signify much."

"But, gents, you'll excuse me if I say I think it *does* signify to *me*, and a'n't any laughing matter!" quoth Titmouse earnestly, and coloring with anger. "Without being rude, I'd rather come to business, if there's any to be done, without so much laughing at me."

"Laughing at you! my dear sir,—no, no!" exclaimed all three in a breath—"laughing *with* you," said Mr. Quirk!—"By the time you mention you may perhaps be able to laugh at Mr. Rag-bag, and everybody else, for I really think we are warranted, sir, in preparing you to expect by that time—that is, if our efforts are successful in your behalf, and if you yield yourself implicitly in all things to our guidance—a prospect of a surprising and splendid change in your circumstances!" Titmouse began to tremble violently, his heart beat rapidly, and his hands were bedewed with a cold moisture.

"I hear, gents," said he, thickly.

"It's not impossible, sir, in plain English," continued Mr. Quirk, "that you may at no distant time (if you turn out to be the person) be put into possession of an estate of somewhere about Ten Thousand a year——"

The words seemed to have struck Titmouse blind—as he saw nothing for some moments; then everything seemed swimming around him, and he felt a sort of faintness stealing over him. The solicitors had hardly been prepared for their communications affecting their little visitor so powerfully. It was a good while before he could appreciate the

little conversation which they now and then addressed to him, or estimate the full importance of the astounding intelligence Mr. Quirk had just communicated. "Beg pardon—but may I make free to ask for a little brandy and water, gents? I feel all over in a kind of tremble," said he, some time afterward.

"Yes—by all means, Mr. Titmouse. Mr. Snap, will you be kind enough to order Betty to bring in a glass of cold brandy

and water from the Jolly Thieves, next door?" This quickly manifested its influence, reassuring him wonderfully. As he sat sipping it, Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap engaged in an earnest conversation, of which he could understand little or nothing. Sometimes they addressed questions to him, but he found it difficult to keep his attention up to anything

said to him for the wild visions that were chasing one another through his heated brain, not a little accelerated by the large tumbler of brandy and water.

"Then, in fact," said Mr. Quirk, at last, "Mr. Titmouse's title accrued in 18—? That's the point—eh, Gammon?"

"Precisely so," said Mr. Gammon calmly.

"To be sure," confidently added Snap, who, having devoted himself exclusively all his life to the sharpest practise of the criminal law, knew about as much of real property law as a snipe.

"Well, Mr. Titmouse," continued Mr. Quirk, laying aside his glasses—"you are likely to be one of the luckiest men of your day! We may be mistaken, but it appears to us that your right is clear to the immediate enjoyment of a fine estate in Yorkshire, worth some £10,000 or £12,000 a year!"

"You don't say so! Oh, gents! I do believe we're all dreaming! Is it all true, indeed?"

"It is, Mr. Titmouse—and we are very proud and happy indeed to be the honored instruments of establishing your rights," said Mr. Gammon.

"There'll be a jolly reckoning for some one, then, shortly —eh? My stars!"

"My dear Mr. Titmouse," said Mr. Gammon, "you have a most just regard for your own interests; there *will* be a reckoning, and a very terrible one ere long, for somebody—but we've time enough before us for all that! Only let us have the unspeakable happiness of seeing you once fairly in possession of your estates, and our office shall know no rest till you have got all you are entitled to—every farthing even!"

"Oh, never fear our letting them rest!" said Mr. Quirk, judiciously accommodating himself to the taste and apprehension of his excited auditor. "Those that must give up the goose must give up the giblets also—ha, ha, ha!" Messrs. Gammon and Snap echoed the laugh, and enjoyed the joke of the head of the firm.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Titmouse, immensely excited by the conjoint influence of the brandy and the news of the night; "capital! capital! hurrah! Such goings on there will be! You're all of the right sorts, gents, I see! 'Pon my life, law for ever! Let's all shake hands, gents! Come, if you

please, all together! all friends to-night!" And the little fellow grasped each of the three readily proffered right hands of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, with an energy that was likely to make all the high contracting parties to that quadruple alliance remember its ratification.

"And is it all a ready-money affair, gents—or rent, and all *that* kind of thing?"

"Why, almost entirely the latter," answered Mr. Quirk, "except the accumulations."

"Then,'pon my soul—I'm a great landlord, am I?"

"Indeed, my dear Mr. Titmouse, you are, and have two very fine houses, one in town and the other in the country."

"Capital! delightful! I'll live in both of them—we'll have *such* goings on! And is it *quite* up to the mark of £10,000 a year?"

"We really entertain no doubt——"

"And such that I can spend all of it, every year?"

"Certainly—no doubt of it—not the least. The rents are paid with most exemplary punctuality—at least," added Mr. Gammon, with a captivating and irresistible smile, and taking him affectionately by the hand—"at least they *will* be, as soon as we have them fairly in our management."

"Oh, *you're* to get it all in for me, are you?" he inquired briskly. The three partners bowed, with the most deprecatingly disinterested air in the world, intimating that, for *his* sake, they were ready to take upon themselves even that troublesome responsibility.

"Capital! couldn't be better! couldn't be better! Ah, ha, ha—you've catched the goose, and must bring me its eggs. Ah, ha, ha! a touch in *your* line, old gent!"

"Ha, ha, ha! excellent! ah, ha, ha!" laughed the three partners at the wit of their new client. Mr. Titmouse joined them, and snapped his fingers in the air.

"Lord—I've just thought of Tag-rag and Company's—I seem as if I hadn't seen or heard of those gents for Lord knows how long! Only fancy old Tag-rag making me a beggar on the 10th of next month—ha, ha, ha!—I sha'n't see that infernal hole any more, anyhow!"

The partners looked rather blank.

"We would venture to suggest, Mr. Titmouse," said Mr. Gammon seriously, "the *absolute necessity* there is for every-

thing on your part and our parts to go on as quietly as before, for a little time to come: to be safe and successful, my dear sir, we must be *secret*."

"Oh, I see, gents! I see; mum—mum's the word, for the present! And now, gents—excuse me, but, to do a bit of business—when am I to *begin* scattering the shiners, eh?" he inquired.

"Oh, of course, sir," replied Mr. Gammon, coldly, "some delay is unavoidable. All we have done, as yet, is to discover that, as far as we are advised and can judge, you will turn out to be the right owner; but very expensive operations must be commenced before you can be put into possession. There are some who won't be persuaded to drop £10,000 a year out of their hands, for the mere asking!"

"The devil there are! *Who* are they that want to keep me any longer out of what's my own?—what's justly mine? Eh? I want to know! Haven't they kept me out long enough?—hang 'em! Put 'em in prison directly—don't spare 'em—rascals!"

"They'll probably, ere long, find their way in that direction—for, however," replied Mr. Quirk, "he's to make up, poor devil, the mesne profits——"

"*Mean* profits?—is that all you call them, gents? 'Pon my life, it's rogue's money—villain's profits! So don't spare him—he's robbed the fatherless, which I am, and an orphan. Keep me out of what's mine, indeed! Curse me if he shall, though!"

"My dear Mr. Titmouse," said Gammon gravely, "we are getting on too fast—dreadfully too fast. It will never do: matters of such immense importance as these cannot be hurried on, or talked of, in this way——"

"No, sir, thanking you all the same; but I think we'd better go on with it now," replied Titmouse impetuously. "Do you think I can stoop to go back to that nasty, beastly shop, and stand behind that counter?"

"Our *decided* opinion, Mr. Titmouse," said Mr. Quirk, emphatically, "is that for many reasons you continue, for a little while longer, in your present situation——"

"What! and I worth £10,000 a year?"

"My dear sir, you've not got it yet," said Mr. Quirk.

"Do you think you'd have told me what you have, if you

weren't sure that I *should*, tho? Gents, you'll excuse me—I hope you will; but business is business, gents—it is; and if you won't do mine, I must look out for them that will—'pon my soul, I must, and——"

"In your present humor, Mr. Titmouse, it would be in vain to discuss the matter," said Mr. Quirk. "Again I tell you that the course we have recommended is, in our opinion, the proper one; excuse me if I add, that you are entirely in our hands—and, if I ask you, what *can* you do but adopt our advice?"

"Why, hang me if I won't employ somebody else—that's flat! S'elp me heaven, I will! So, good-night, gents; you'll find that Tittlebat Titmouse isn't to be trifled with!" So saying, Mr. Titmouse clapped his hat on his head and bounced out of the room.

"Did you ever see such a little beast?" exclaimed Mr. Quirk, turning to Mr. Snap.

— "Tittlebat Titmouse isn't to be trifled with!

"Beggar on horseback!" exclaimed Snap.

"It won't do, however, for him to go at large in his present frame of mind—he may ruin the thing altogether——"

"As good as £500 a year out of the office," said Snap.

"It cannot be helped *now*," said Mr. Gammon, with a sigh of vexation, turning to Mr. Quirk, and seizing his hat—"he must be managed—so I'll go after him and bring him back; and we must really try and do something for him to keep him quiet till the thing's brought a little into train."

As soon as Mr. Titmouse heard the street door shut after him, with a kind of bang, he snapped his fingers once or twice by way of letting off a little of the inflammable air that was in him, and muttered, "Pretty chaps those, upon my soul! I'll expose them all! I'll apply to the lord mayor—they're a pack of swindlers, they are! This is the way they treat *me*, who've got a title to £10,000 a year! To be sure"—He stood still for a moment, and another moment, and dismay came quickly over him; for it suddenly occurred to his partially obfuscated intellect—what *hold* had he got on Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap?—what *could* he do?—what *had* he done? Each second of his deep and rapid reflection rendered more impetuous his desire and determination to return and make his peace with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap. He was in the act of turning toward the office, when Mr. Gammon softly laid his hand upon the shoulder of his repentant client.

"Mr. Titmouse! my dear sir, what is the matter with you? How could we so misunderstand each other?"

Titmouse's small cunning was on the *qui vive*, and he saw and followed up his advantage. "I am going," said he, in a resolute tone, "to speak to some one else, in the morning."

"Ah, to be sure—I supposed as much. You will take any steps, my dear sir, that occur to you, and act as you may be advised."

"Monstrous kind of you, 'pon my life! to come and give me such good advice!" exclaimed Titmouse with a sneer.

"Oh, don't mention it!" said Gammon coolly; "I came out of pure good nature, to assure you that our office, notwithstanding what has passed, entertains not the slightest personal ill feeling toward you for thus throwing off our hands a fearfully expensive, and most harassing enterprise—which we had too rashly undertaken——"

"Hem!" exclaimed Titmouse once or twice.

"So good-night, Mr. Titmouse—good night! God bless you! we part friends!"

"Why, sir," quoth Titmouse, with a mixture of embarrassment and alarm, "if I thought you all meant the correct thing—hem! I say, the correct thing by me—I shouldn't so much mind a little disappointment for the time; but you

must own, Mr. Gammon, it is very hard being kept out of one's own so long—honor, now! isn't it?"

"True, very true, Mr. Titmouse. Very hard it is, indeed, to bear, and we all felt deeply for you, and would have set everything in train——"

"*Would have*——"

"Yes, my dear Mr. Titmouse, we *would* have done it, and brought you through every difficulty—over every obstacle, prodigious though they are, and almost innumerable."

"Why—you—don't—hardly—quite—mean to say you've given it all up?—What, already! 'Pon my life! O Lord!" exclaimed Titmouse, in evident trepidation.

Mr. Gammon had triumphed over Mr. Titmouse! whom, nothing loath, he brought back, in two minutes' time, into the room which Titmouse had just before so rudely quitted. Mr. Quirk and Mr. Snap had now *their* parts to perform in the little scene which they had determined on enacting. They were in the act of locking up desks and drawers, evidently on the move; and they received Mr. Titmouse with an air of cold surprise.

"Mr. Titmouse again!" exclaimed Mr. Quirk, taking his gloves out of his hat. "Back again!—an unexpected honor."

"Leave anything behind?" inquired Mr. Snap—"don't see anything——"

"Oh, no, sir! No, sir!" exclaimed Titmouse, with eager anxiety. "This gent and I have made it all up, gents! I'm not vexed any more—not the least; 'pon my soul I'm not."

"It's growing *very* late," said Mr. Quirk coldly, looking at his watch; "however, after what you have said, probably at some future time, when we've leisure to look into the thing——"

Poor Titmouse was ready to drop on his knees, in mingled agony and fright.

"May I be allowed to say," interposed the bland voice of Mr. Gammon, addressing himself to Mr. Quirk, "that Mr. Titmouse a few minutes ago assured me that if you, as the head of the firm, could only be persuaded to take up his case again——"

"I did—I did indeed, gents! so help me——!" interrupted Mr. Titmouse, eagerly backing with an oath the ready lie of Mr. Gammon.

Mr. Quirk drew his hand across his chin musingly, and stood silently for a few moments, evidently irresolute.

"Well," said he at length, but in a very cool way, "since that is so, probably we may be induced to resume our heavy labors in your behalf; and if you will favor us with a call to-morrow night, at the same hour, we may by that time have made up our minds as to the course we shall think fit to adopt."

"Lord, sir, I'll be here as the clock strikes and as meek as a mouse; and pray, have it all your own way for the future, gents—do!"

"Good-night, sir—good-night!" exclaimed the partners, motioning toward the door.

"Good-night, gents!" said Titmouse, bowing very low, and feeling himself at the same time being bowed *out!* As he passed out of the room, he cast a lingering look at their three frigid faces, as if they were angels sternly shutting him out from Paradise.

CHAPTER IV

TELLS HOW MR. HUCKABACK INTERFERES IN THE AFFAIR, WITH DISASTROUS RESULTS BOTH TO HIMSELF AND THE HERO

CLOSET COURT had never looked so odious to Titmouse as it did on his return from this memorable interview. Dreadfully distressed and harassed, he flung himself on his bed for a moment, directly he had shut his door, intending presently to rise and undress; but Sleep, having got him prostrate, secured her victory. She waved her black wand over him, and—he woke not till eight o'clock in the morning. When he heard the clock strike he sprung off the bed in a fright. Dashing a little water into his face, and scarce staying to wipe it off, he ran down-stairs, through the court, and along the street, never stopping till he had found his way into—almost the very arms of the dreaded Mr. Tag-rag!

"Yours very respectfully, Mr. Titmouse—Thomas Tag-rag!" exclaimed that personage with mock solemnity, bowing to his breathless shopman.

"I—I—beg your pardon, sir; but I wasn't very well, and over-slept myself," stammered Titmouse.

"Ne-ver mind, Mr. Titmouse! ne-ver mind!—it don't much signify, as it happens," interrupted Mr. Tag-rag bitterly; "you've just got an hour and a half to take this piece of silk, with my compliments, to Messrs. Shuttle and Weaver, in Dirt Street, Spitalfields, and ask them if they aren't ashamed to send it to a West-end house like mine; and bring back a better piece instead of it! D'ye *hear*, sir?"

"Yes, sir—but—am I to go before my breakfast, sir?"

"Did I say a word about breakfast, sir? You heard my orders, sir; you can attend to them or not, Mr. Titmouse, as you please!"

Off trotted Titmouse *instanter*, without his breakfast; and so Tag-rag gained one object he had had in view.

Titmouse was detained for a cruel length of time at Messrs. Shuttle and Weaver's, so that it was two o'clock before he reached Tag-rag's, completely exhausted and dispirited. The gentlemen of the shop had finished their dinners.

"Go up-stairs and get your dinner, sir!" exclaimed Tag-rag imperiously, after having received Messrs. Shuttle and Weaver's message.

Titmouse's dinner was presently brought by a slatternly servant-girl. It was in an uncovered basin, which appeared to contain nothing but the leavings of his companions—a savory mixture of cold potatoes and broken meat, a little hot water having been thrown over it to make it appear warm and fresh. His plate had not been cleaned after its recent use, but evidently only hastily smeared over with a greasy towel, as also seemed his knife and fork, which in their disgusting state, he was fain to put up with, the tablecloth on which he might have wiped them having been removed. A hunch of bread that seemed to have been tossing about in the pan for days, and half-a-pint of flat-looking and sour-smelling table-beer, completed the fare set before him. He was in the act of scooping out of the basin some of its inviting contents, when —"Titmouse!" exclaimed one of his shopmates, peering in at him through the half-opened door, "Mr. Tag-rag wants you! He says you've had plenty of time to finish your dinner!"

"Oh, tell him I'm only just beginning."

In a few minutes' time Mr. Tag-rag himself entered the room, stuttering—"How much longer, sir, is it your pleasure to spend over your dinner, eh?"

"Not another moment, sir," answered Titmouse, looking with disgust at the victuals before him; "if you'll only allow me a few minutes to go home and buy a penny roll instead of all this——"

"Ve-ry good, sir! Ve-ry parti—cu—larly good, Mr. Titmouse," replied Tag-rag, with ill-subdued fury; "anything else that I can make a *leetle* memorandum of against the day of your leaving us?"

When Titmouse left the shop that night, a little after nine, he hurried to his lodgings, to make himself as imposing in his appearance before Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap as his time and means would admit of. Behold, on a table lay the following letter from his friend Huckaback:

"Dear Tit,

"I hope you are well, which is what I can only middling say in respect of me. Being near the neighborhood of Saffron Hill, to-day, Titty, with some light goods, I thought I would call upon *our* lawyers to see how affairs was getting on, and stir them up a bit——"

This almost took Titmouse's breath away!

—"feeling most *interested* on your account, as you know, dear Tit, I do. I said I wanted to speak to one of the gentlemen on business of wital importance; whereat I was quickly shown into a room where two gents was sitting. Having put down my parcel for a minute on the table I said I was a very intimate friend of yours, and had called in to see how things went on about the advertisement; whereat you never saw in your life how struck they looked, and stared at one another in speechless silence, till they said to me what concerned me about the business? or something of that nature, but in such a way that *ris a rage* in me directly, all for your sake (for I did not like the looks of things), and says I, I said, we would let them know we were not to be *gammoned;* whereat up rose the youngest of the two, and ringing the bell, he says to a tight-laced young gentleman with a pen behind his ear, 'Show him to the door,' which I was at once; but, in doing so, let out a little of my mind to them. They're no better than they should be, you see if they are; but when we touch the property, we'll show them who is their masters, which consoles me. Good-by, keep your sperrits up, and I will call and tell you more about it on Sunday. So farewell.—Your true friend,

"R. Huckaback."

All that part of the foregoing letter which related to its amiable writer's interview with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, Titmouse read in a kind of spasm—he could not draw a breath, and felt a choking sensation coming over him. After a while, "I may spare myself," thought he, "the trouble of rigging out—Huckaback has done my business for me with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap—mine will only be a walk in vain!" Of course, Huckaback would seem to have been sent by him; seeing he appeared to have resumed the hectoring tone which Titmouse had tried so vainly over night, and

now so bitterly repented of; and he had no doubt grossly insulted the arbiters of Titmouse's destiny—he had even said that he (Titmouse) would not be GAMMONED by them! But time was pressing—the experiment must be made; and with a beating heart he scrambled into a change of clothes—bottling up his wrath against the unconscious Huckaback till he should see that worthy. In a miserable state of mind he set off soon after for Saffron Hill.

When he reached the place, he was in a bath of perspiration. He stood for a moment with his hat off, wiping his reeking forehead and endeavoring to recover himself a little before entering the dreaded presence to which he had been hastening. Finally, *ring* went the bell; as softly, however, as he could; for he recollected that it was a very loud bell, and he did not wish to offend. He stood for some time, and nobody answered. He waited for nearly two minutes, and trembled, assailed by a thousand vague fears. He might not, however, have rung loudly enough—so—again, a little louder, did he venture to ring. Again he waited. He breathed faster, clinched his fist, and involuntarily raised it in a menacing way, when he heard himself addressed. "Oh! dear me, sir, I *hope* I haven't kept you waiting," said the old woman whom he had seen before. She fumbled in her pocket for the door-key, for she had evidently been out shopping.

"Oh, dear! no, ma'am," replied Titmouse with anxious civility, and a miserable smile—"Afraid I may have kept *them* waiting," he added, dreading to hear the answer.

"Oh, no, sir, not at all—they've all been gone since a little after nine; but there's a letter I was to give you. Here it is!"

"Seem particularly anxious for me to get it—did they?" inquired Titmouse, with a strong effort to appear unconcerned.

"No, sir—Mr. Quirk only said I was to give it to you when you called."

He quickly espied a lamp at a corner which promised to afford him an uninterrupted opportunity for inspecting his letter, which read as follows:—

"Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap present their compliments to Mr. Titmouse, and are anxious to save him the trouble of his intended visit this evening.

"They exceedingly regret that obstacles (which it is to be hoped, however, may not prove *ultimately* insurmountable) exist in the way of their prosecuting their intended inquiries on behalf of Mr. Titmouse.

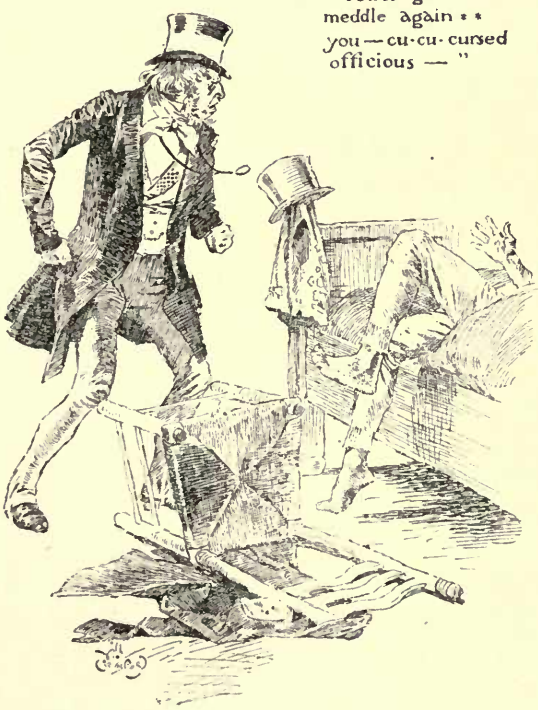
"Since their last night's interview with him, circumstances, which they could not have foreseen, and over which they have no control, have occurred, which render it unnecessary for Mr. T. to give himself any more anxiety in the affair—at least, not until he shall have heard from Messrs. Q. G. and S. If anything of importance *should* hereafter transpire, it is not improbable that Mr. T. may hear from them.

"They were favored this afternoon, with a visit from Mr. T.'s friend—a Mr. Hucklebottom."

When poor Titmouse had finished reading over this vague, frigid, and disheartening note a second time, a convulsive sob or two pierced his bosom, indicative of its being indeed swollen with sorrow; and at length, overcome by his feelings, he cried bitterly—not checked even by the occasional exclamations of one or two passers-by. At length his eye lit upon the strange word which was intended to describe his friend Huckaback; and it instantly changed both the kind of his feelings, and the direction in which they had been rushing. Grief became rage; and the stream foamed in quite a new direction—namely, toward Huckaback. The fire that was thus quickly kindled within, soon dried up the source of his tears. He crammed the letter into his pocket, and started off at once in the direction of Leicester Square. Hotter and hotter became his rage, as he neared the residence of Huckaback. When he had reached it, he sprung up-stairs; knocked at the door: and on the instant of its being opened by Huckaback, who was undressing, Titmouse sprung toward him, let fly a goodly number of violent blows upon his face and breast—and down fell Huckaback upon the bed behind him, insensible, and bleeding profusely from his nose.

"There! there!"—gasped Titmouse, breathless and exhausted, discharging a volley of oaths and opprobrious epithets at the victim of his fury. "Do it again! You will, won't you! *You'll* go—and meddle again in other people's—you——cu-cu-cursed officious"—But his rage was spent—the

paroxysm was over; the silent and bleeding figure of Huckaback was before his eyes; and he gazed at him, terror-stricken. What had he done! He sunk down on the bed beside Huckaback—then started up, wringing his hands, and staring at him in an ecstasy of remorse and fright. Frightened almost



"You'll go and meddle again * * you—cu-cu-cursed officious—"

out of his senses, he addressed himself to the recovery of Huckaback. Finally his friend opened his eyes and stared on Titmouse with a bewildered air.

"What's been the matter?" at length he faintly inquired.

"Oh, Hucky! so glad to hear you speak again. It's I—I—Titty! I did it! Strike me, Hucky, as soon as you're

well enough! Do—kick me—anything you choose! I won't hinder you!" cried Titmouse, sinking on his knees, and clasping his hands together, as he perceived Huckaback rapidly reviving.

"Why, what *is* the matter?" repeated that gentleman, with a wondering air, raising his hand to his nose, from which the blood was still trickling.

"I did it all—yes, I did!" continued Titmouse, gazing on him with a look of agony and remorse.

"Why—are you mad?" inquired Huckaback, grasping him by the collar rather roughly.

"Yes, quite! Mad!—ruined!—gone to the devil all at once!"

Huckaback stared at him more and more; and began at length to suspect how matters stood—namely, that the Sunday's incident had turned Titmouse's head—he having also, no doubt, heard some desperate bad news during the day, smashing all his hopes. A mixture of emotions kept him silent. Astonishment—apprehension—doubt—pride—pique—resentment. He had been *struck*—his blood had been drawn—by the man there before him on his knees, formerly his friend; now, he supposed, a madman.

"Why, curse me, Titmouse, if I can make up my mind what to do with you!" he exclaimed. "I—I suppose you're going mad, or gone mad, and I must forgive you. But get away with you—out with you, or—or—I'll call in——"

"Oh dear, dear!" groaned Titmouse; "if I've been a brute to you, which is quite true, you've been the ruin of me clean! I'm clean done for, Huck. Cleaned out! You've done my business for me; knocked it all on the head. I sha'n't never hear any more of it—they've said as much in their letter—they say that you've called——"

Huckaback now began to have a glimmering notion of his having been connected with the mischief of the day. He audibly drew in his breath, as he recollected his visit to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; and adverted more particularly to his *threats*, uttered, too, in Titmouse's name, and as if by his authority. Whew!

"You *have* ruined me! you have, Huckaback!" continued Titmouse, with increasing vehemence; "and I shall be cutting my throat—nay," striking his fist on the table, "I will!"

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Huckaback, apprehensively.

"No, Titmouse, don't—don't think of it; it will all come right yet, depend on't; you see if it don't!"

"Oh, no! it's all done for—it's all up with me!"

"But what's been done?—let us hear," said Huckaback, as he passed a wet towel to and fro over his ensanguined features. Titmouse, with many grievous sighs, took out the letter and read it aloud. "And see how they've spelled your name, Hucky."

"How *particular* vulgar!" exclaimed Huckaback. "And so this is all they say of *me*. How do you come to know that I've been doing you a mischief? All I did was just to look in, as respectful as possible, to ask how you was, and they very civilly told me you was very well, and we parted——"

"Nay, now, that's a lie, Huckaback, and you know it!" interrupted Titmouse.

"It's true, so help me——!" vehemently asseverated Huckaback.

"Why, perhaps you'll deny that you wrote and told me all you said," interrupted Titmouse indignantly, feeling in his pocket for Huckaback's letter.

"Oh—ay, if you mean *that*,—hem!"—he stammered.

"Come, you know you're a liar, Huck—but it's no good now; liar or no liar, it's all over."

"The pot and kettle, anyhow, Tit, as far as that goes—but let's spell over this letter; we haven't studied it yet; I'm a hand, rather, at getting at what's said in a letter!—Come, there's a glimpse of daylight yet, Titty!" said Huckaback, as he concluded reading it.

"Now! Is there really? Do tell me, Hucky——"

"Why, first and foremost, how uncommon polite they are. If they'd meant to give the thing the go-by altogether, what could have been easier than to have said so?—but they haven't said anything of the sort, so they don't mean to give it all up."

"Lord, Huck! what would I give for such a head as yours!"

"To be sure, they do say there's an *obstacle*, but they say again, that it's—it's—curse their big words—to be got over in time."

"Well—that's something, isn't it?"

"To be sure it is; and a'n't anything better than nothing?

But then again, here's a stone in the other pocket; they say there's a *circumstance!* Don't you hate circumstances, Titty? —I do."

"So do I!—What does it mean? I've often heard—isn't it a thing? And that may be—anything."

"Oh, there's a great dif—hem! And they go on to say it's happened since you was there——"

"Curse me, then, if that don't mean *you*, Huckaback!" interrupted Titmouse, with returning anger.

"No, that can't be it; they said they'd no control over the circumstance;—now they *had* over me; for they ordered me to the door, and I went; a'n't that so, Titty? and then again, you know they are lawyers; and do *they* ever write anything that hasn't got more in it than anybody can find out? And don't you see they say they'll be sure to write if anything turns up?"

"So they do, to be sure! Well—I'd forgot that!" interrupted Titmouse, brightening up.

"Then, isn't there their advertisement in the *Flash?* They hadn't their eye on anything when they put it there, I dare say!—They can't get out of that, anyhow!"

"Why, Hucky, so help me——! and 'pon my soul, that old gent, Mr. Quirk, told me"—Titmouse's voice trembled at the recollection—"he says, 'Sir, you're the real owner of ten Thousand a year.'"

"Lord, Tit! you take my breath away," gasped Huckaback, his eyes fixed intently on his friend's face.

"Yes; and they said I might marry the most beautifulest woman that ever my eyes saw, for the asking."

"You'll forget poor Bob Huckaback, Tit!" murmured his friend despondingly.

"Not I——"

"Tit," exclaimed his friend, a brilliant idea suddenly coming to him, "how much did you promise to come down, if you got the thing?"

"*Come down!*—I—really—by Jove, I didn't! No—I'm sure I didn't!"—answered Titmouse, as if new light had burst in upon him.

"Why, Tit, I never seed such a goose! That's it, depend upon it—it's the whole thing! That's what they're driving at, in the note!—Why, Tit, where was your wits? D'ye think

such gents as them—great lawyers, too—will work for nothing?—You write and tell them you will come down handsome—say a couple of hundreds, besides expenses—Gad! 'twill set you on your pins again, Titty!—Rot me!"

"The thoughts of it all going right again is enough to set me wild, Hucky!—But what shall we do to set the thing going again?

"*Quarter past one!*" quivered the voice of the paralytic watchman beneath, startling the friends out of their excited colloquy. They hastily agreed that Titmouse should immediately write to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap a most abject letter, solemnly pledging himself to obey their injunctions in everything for the future, and offering them a handsome reward for their exertions, if successful. And here follows the letter he managed to indite:—

"*To Messrs.* QUIRK, GAMMON, *and* SNAP.

"GENTS,—Yr Esteem'd Favour lies now before Me, which *must Say* have Given me Much Concern, seeing I Thought it was All Made up betwixt us That was of Such an *Unpleasant Nature* on Tuesday night (ultimo) wh I most humbly Own (and Acknowledge) was all alone and *intirely* of My Own Fault, and Not in the Least Your's which behaved to me, Must say, In the most Respectful and superior manner that was possible to think Of, for I truly Say I never was In the Company of Such Imminent and superior Gents before in my life wh will take my oath sincerely Of, Gents. Please to consider the Brandy (wh *do* think *was Uncommon Stiff*) such a flustrum As I Was In before, to, wh was Evident to All of Us there then Assemblid and very natral like to be the Case Seeing I have nevir known what Peas of Mind was since I behaved in Such a *Oudacious* way wh truly was the case I can't Deny to Such Gents as Yourselfs that were doing me such Good Fortune And Kindness to me as it would Be a Dreadful *sin and shame* (such as Trust I can never be Guilty of) to be (wh am not) and never Can Be insensible Of, Gents do Consider all this Favourably because of my humble Amends wh I here Make with the greatest Trouble in my Mind that I have Had Ever Since, it was all of the Sperrits I Tooke wh made me Go On at such a Rate wh was always (beg to Assure yr most respe house) the Case Since my birth

when I took Sperrits never so little Since I had the Meazles when I was 3 Years Old as I Well Recollect and hope it will be Born in Mind what is Often Said, and I'm sure I've read it Somewhere Else that People that Is Drunk Always speaks the *Direct Contrarywise* of their True and Real Thoughts. (wh am certain never was any Thing Truer in my case) so as I get the Money or What not, do whatever you Like wh are quite welcome to Do if you please, and no questions Asked, don't Mind saying by The Way It shall Be As Good as £200 note in The way of your Respe House if I Get the Estate of wh am much in Want of. Mr. Gamon (wh is the most Upright gent that ever I came across in All my Life) will tell you that I Was Quite Cut up when he came After me in that kind way and told him Then how I loved yr Respecte House and would do all In My power to Serve You, which see if I Don't, I was in such a rage with that Fellow (He's only in a *Situation* in Tottenham Ct Road) Huckaback which is his true name it was an *oudacious* thing, and have given him such a Precious Good hiding last Night as you never saw when on his Bendid Knees He asked the pardon of your Respectable House, sayg nothing Of Me wh wd not allow because I said I would Not Forgive Him because he had not injured me: But you, wh I wonder at his *Impudence* in Calling on Professional Gents like you, if I get The Estate shall never cease to Think well of you and mean While how full of Trouble I am *Often Thinking Of Death* which is the End of Every Thing And then in that Case who will the Property Go to Seeing I Leave never a Brother or Sister Behind me. And Therefore Them That wd Get it I Feel Sure of wd Not do so Well by you (if You will Only believe Me) So Gents. This is All at present That I will Make so Bold to trouble you With About my Unhappy Affairs Only to say That am *used* most Intolerably Bad now In The Shop quite Tyranicall And Mr. Tag-Rag as Set Them All Against Me and I shall Never Get Another Situatn for want of a Char which he will give me sayg notg at Present of the Sort of Victules wh give me Now to Eat Since Monday last, For Which am Sure the Devil must have come In to That Gentleman (Mr. Tag-rag, he was only himself in a Situation in Holborn once, gettg the Business by marryg the widow wh wonder At for he is nothing Particular to Look At.) I am yrs

Humbly to Command Till Death
(always Humbly Begging pardon for the bad Conduct wh was guilty of when In Liquor Especially On an Empty Stomach, Having Taken Nothing all that Day excepting what I could not eat,)

"Your's most Respy

"TITTLEBAT TITMOUSE.

"P. S. Will Bring that young Man with Tears In his Eyes to Beg yr pardon Over again If You Like wh will Solemnly Swear if Required That he did It all of His *own* Head And that Have given him It For it in the Way That is Written Above And humbly Trust You Will make Me So happy Once more by Writing To Me (if it is only a line) To say You Have Thought No more of it. T. T. No 9 Closet Ct. Oxford Street. 14/7/18——"

This touching epistle, over which Titmouse had labored long and earnestly, might have brought tears into Mr. Quirk's eyes, if he had been *used* to the melting mood. As it was, he stepped with it into Mr. Gammon's room. That gentleman read it over, at every sentence bursting into soft laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed on concluding it—"a comical gentleman, Mr. Titmouse, upon my honor!"

"Funny—isn't it, rather?" interposed Mr. Quirk, standing with his hands fumbling about in his breeches pocket.

"What a crawling despicable little rascal!—ha, ha, ha!"

"But he's now in a humor for *training*, at all events—isn't he?" exclaimed Quirk—"we've something now to go to work upon—gradually."

"I should say, with all deference, that we'll take no more notice of this fellow till we've got some screw tight enough——"

"Why—all that may be very well: but you see, Gammon, the fellow seems the real heir, after all—and if *he* don't get it, *no one can;* and if *he* don't—*we* don't! eh?"

"There's a very great deal of force in that observation, Mr. Quirk," said Gammon emphatically. If Quirk might be compared to an old file, Gammon was the *oil!*—so they got on, in the main, very well together. "I think, by the way," continued Mr. Gammon, "it may be as well to acknowledge the

receipt of the fellow's note—eh?—*Can't* do any harm, you know, and civility costs nothing—hem!"

"The very thing I was thinking of," replied Quirk. So they despatched the following note to Mr. Titmouse:—

"Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap have the pleasure of acknowledging the receipt of Mr. Titmouse's polite letter of last night's date; and earnestly beg that he will not distress himself about the little incident that occurred at their office on Tuesday night, and which they assure him they have quite forgotten. They made all allowances, however their feelings suffered at the time. They beg Mr. T. will give them credit for not losing sight of his interests to the best of their ability; obstructed as they are, however, by numerous serious difficulties. If they should be in any degree hereafter overcome, he may rest assured of their promptly communicating with him; and till then they trust Mr. T. will not inconvenience himself by calling on, or writing to them.

"P.S.—Messrs. Q. G. and S. regret to hear that any unpleasantness has arisen [Gammon could hardly write for laughter] between Mr. Titmouse and his friend Mr. Hicklebagle, who, they assure him, manifested a very warm interest in behalf of Mr. T., and conducted himself with the greatest propriety on the occasion of his calling upon Messrs. Q. G. and S. They happened at that moment to be engaged in matters of the highest importance; which will, they trust, explain any appearance of abruptness they might have exhibited toward that gentleman. Perhaps Mr. Titmouse will be so obliging as to intimate as much to Mr. Hickerbag."

CHAPTER V

WHEREIN IS DEPICTED THE DESPERATE STRAIT TO WHICH THE HERO IS FINALLY REDUCED BY THE LAW'S DELAYS

THE moment that Titmouse had read over this mollifying document, he hastened to his friend Huckaback. That gentleman declared, with a great oath, that Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap were "perfect gentlemen," and would "do the right thing, Titmouse might depend upon it"; an assurance which greatly cheered Titmouse. Huckaback had certainly a wonderful knack of keeping up Titmouse's spirits, whatever cause the latter fancied he might really have for depression.

As for Mr. Tag-rag, he began at length to relax his *active* exertions against Titmouse, simply because of the trouble it gave him to keep them up. He attributed the pallid cheek and depressed manner of Titmouse entirely to the discipline which had been inflicted upon him at the shop, and was gratified at perceiving that all his other young men seemed, especially in his presence, to have imbibed his hatred of Titmouse. Titmouse attempted once or twice, during the week, to obtain a situation elsewhere, but in vain. He could expect no character from Tag-rag; and when the 10th of August should have arrived, what was to become of him? These were the kind of thoughts often passing through his mind during Sunday, which he and Huckaback spent together in unceasing conversation on the one absorbing event of the last week.

Altho the sun shone as vividly and beautifully as on the preceding Sunday, to Titmouse's saddened eye there seemed a sort of gloom everywhere. Up and down the Park he and Huckaback walked toward the close of the afternoon; but Titmouse had not so elastic a strut as before. He felt empty and sinking. What with the fatigue of a long day's saunter, the vexation of having had but a hasty, inferior, and unrefreshing meal, which did not deserve the name of dinner, and

their unpleasant thoughts, both seemed depressed as they walked along the streets. At length they arrived at the open doors of a gloomy-looking building, into which two or three sad and prim-looking people were entering. After walking a few paces past the door—"Do you know, Huck," said Titmouse, stopping, "I've often thought that—that—there's something in *Religion?*"

"To be sure there is, for those that like it—who doubts it? It's all very well in its place, no doubt," replied Huckaback with much surprise, as he felt himself slowly being swayed around toward the building in question. "But what of that?"

"Oh, nothing; but—hem! hem!" replied Titmouse, sinking his voice to a whisper— "a touch of—religion—would not be so much amiss just now, I feel—uncommon inclined that way, somehow."

"Religion's all very well, Titty, dear! for them that has much to be thankful for; but devil take me! what have either you or me to be——"

"But, Huck—how do you know but we might *get* something to be thankful for, by praying?—I've often heard of great things;—come."

Huckaback stood for a moment irresolute, twirling about his cane, and looking rather distastefully toward the dingy building. "To be sure," he said, faintly, and the intelligent and piously disposed couple found their way into a church where evening service was being performed. Titmouse paid a most exemplary attention to what was going on, kneeling, sitting and standing with exact propriety, in the proper places, joining audibly in the responses. He even rebuked Huckaback for whispering (during one of the most solemn parts of the service) that "there was a pretty gal in the next pew!"

"Curse me, Hucky!" said he heatedly, as soon as they had quitted the church, and were fairly in the street—"Curse me if—if—ever I felt so comfortable-like in my mind before, as I do now—I'll go next Sunday again."

Titmouse continued in what he doubtless imagined to be a devout frame of mind, for several minutes after quitting the church, until they parted, each speeding homeward. On reaching his lodgings, Titmouse sunk into profound depression. The

uncertainties of his situation drove him nearly distracted. His circumstances were becoming utterly desperate. He continued to endure great suffering at Mr. Tag-rag's during the day—the butt of his companions, and the victim of his employer's vile and vulgar spirit of hatred and oppression. His spirit was very nearly broken. Tho he inquired for another situation, he was unsuccessful; for all whom he applied to spoke of the *strict character* they should require, "before taking a new hand into their establishment." His occupation at nights was either to call upon Huckaback, whose sympathy he was exhausting rapidly, or to solace his feelings by walking down to Saffron Hill, and lingering about the closed office of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap—there was a kind of gratification even in that!

At length, no more than three or four shillings stood between him and utter destitution; and the only person in the world whom he could apply to for even the most trivial assistance, was Huckaback—whom he knew to be scarcely any better off than himself; and who treated him more and more coldly, as the week wore on without any tidings from Saffron Hill. Various faint hints had been thrown away; for Huckaback either did not, or could not, comprehend them. But at length a sudden and fearful pressure compelled him to speak out. Gripe, the collector, called one morning for the poor's rates due from Mrs. Squallop, Titmouse's landlady, and cleaned her out of almost every penny of ready money, and down she came upon Titmouse. His heart sunk within him as he heard the fat old termagant ascending the stairs. Her loud imperative single knock vibrated through his heart, and he was ready to drop.

"Oh, Mrs. Squallop! How d'ye do, Mrs. Squallop?" commenced Titmouse faintly, when he had opened the door; "won't you take a chair?"

"No—I a'n't come to stay, Mr. Titmouse, because d'ye see in coorse you've got a pound, at least, ready for me, as you promised long ago; there's old Gripe been here to-day, and he's cleaned *me* out; so, in coorse, I come up to *you*. Got it?"

"Sorry——"

"Oh, bother your sorrow, Mr. Titmouse!"

"I—I can't, so help me——" gasped Titmouse.

"You can't! Why not, I make bold to ask?" inquired Mrs. Squallop, striving to choke down her rage.

"P'r'aps you can get blood out of a stone, Mrs. Squallop; it's what I can't," replied Titmouse. "I've got two shillings —there they are," throwing them on the table; "and cuss me if I've another rap in the world; there, ma'am!"

"You're a liar, then, that's flat!" exclaimed Mrs. Squallop, slapping her hand upon the table, with a violence that made the candle quiver on it and almost fall down. You have the *himperance* to stand there and tell me you've got nothing in the world but them *two shillings!* Yet turns you out every Sunday morning of your life like a lord, with your pins, and your rings, and your chains, and your fine coat, and your gloves, and your spurs, and your dandy cane —ough! you whipper-snapper! You've got all my rent on your back, and have had ever Sunday for three months, you cheat! You're a robbing the widow and fatherless! Look at me and my six fatherless children down there, you good-for-nothing, nasty, proud puppy!—eugh! it makes me sick to see you. You've bought a gold chain with my rent, you rascal! *You* dress yourself out?—Ha, ha! you— carrot-headed——"

"You'd better not say that again, Mrs. Squallop," quoth Titmouse, with a fierce glance.

"Not say it again!—ha, ha! Why, d'ye think I won't say whatever I choose, and in my own house? You're a Titmouse by name and by nature; there a'n't a cockroach crawling downstairs that a'n't more respectable-like and better behaved than you."

"Now, what *is* the use," said Titmouse gently, being completely cowed—"now, what good *can* it do to go on in this way, Mrs. Squallop?"

"Missus me no missus, Mr. Titmouse, but pay me my rent, you jack-a-dandy! You've got my rent on your back and on your little finger; and I'll have it off you before I've done with you, I warrant you. I'm your landlady, and I'll have you up; I'll have old Thumbscrew here the first thing in the morning, and distrain everything, and you, too, you jackdaw, if any one would buy you, which they won't! I'll turn you inside out, tho I know there's nothing in you!"—and the virago shook her fist at him, looking as tho she had

not yet uttered even half that was in her heart toward him.

Titmouse trembled violently; his lips quivered; and the long-pent-up tears forced their way at length over his eyelids and fell fast down his cheeks.

"Ah, you may well cry! you may! But it's too late! it's

"I'm your landlady and I'll have you up"

my turn to cry now! Don't you think that I feel for my own flesh and blood, that is, my six children? And aren't you keeping the fatherless out of their own?" continued Mrs. Squallop, vehemently.

"*They've* got a mother—a kind good mother—to take care of them," Titmouse sobbed; "but there's no one in the—the—world that cares a straw for *me*—this twenty years!"

"Well, then, more's the pity for *you*. If you had, they wouldn't have let you make such a puppy of yourself—and at your landlady's expense, too," said Mrs. Squallop, dropping her voice a little; for she was a MOTHER after all, and she knew that what poor Titmouse had just stated was quite true. She was softening rapidly toward the weeping and miserable little object, on whom she had been heaping such violent and bitter abuse. He was a great fool, to be sure—he was very fond of fine clothes—he knew no better—he had, however, paid his rent well enough till lately—he was a very quiet, well-disposed lodger, for all *she* had known—he had given her youngest child a pear not long ago. Really, thought Mrs. Squallop, I may have gone a *little* too far.

"I—I—*can't* speak," sobbed Titmouse—"I—I feel ready to drop—everybody hates me"—here he paused; and for some moments neither spoke. "I've been kept on my legs the whole day about the town by Mr. Tag-rag, and had no dinner. I—I—wish I was *dead!* I do!—you may take all I have—here it is," continued Titmouse, with his foot pushing toward Mrs. Squallop the old hair trunk that contained all his little finery. "I sha'n't want them much longer, for I'm turned out of my situation."

This was too much for Mrs. Squallop, and she was obliged to wipe her full eyes with the corner of her apron, without saying a word. Her heart smote her for the misery she had inflicted on one who seemed quite broken down. Pity suddenly flew, fluttering his wings—soft dove!—into her heart, and put to flight in an instant all her enraged feelings. "Come, Mr. Titmouse," said she, in quite an altered tone, "never mind *me;* I'm a plain-spoken woman enough, I dare say—and often say more than I mean—for I—I know I a'n't over-particular when my blood's up—but—Lord!—I—I wouldn't hurt a hair of your head, poor chap!—for all I've said—no, not for double the rent you owe me. Come! don't go on so, Mr. Titmouse—what's the use?—it's all quite—over—I'm so sorry—Lud! if I'd *really* thought"—she almost sobbed—"you'd been so—so—why, I'd have waited till to-morrow night before I'd said a word. But, Mr. Titmouse, since you haven't had any dinner, won't you have a mouthful of something—a bit of bread and cheese?—I'll soon fetch you up a bit and a drop of beer—we've just had it in for our suppers."

"No, thank you—I can't—I can't eat!" sobbed Titmouse.

"Oh, bother it, but you *shall!* I'll go down and fetch it up in half a minute, as sure as my name is Squallop!" and out of the room and down-stairs she bustled, glad of a moment to recover herself.

"Lord-a-mercy!" said she, on entering her room, to her eldest daughter, while she hastily cut a thick hunch of bread and a good slice of cheese—"there I've been a-rating that poor little chap, up at the top room, like anything—and I really don't think he's had a morsel of victuals in his belly this precious day; and I've made him cry, poor soul! as if his heart would break. Pour us out half a pint of that beer, Sally—a *good* half pint, mind!—I'm going to take it up-stairs directly. I've gone a deal too far with him, I do think; but it's all of that nasty old Gripe; I've been wrong all the day through it!—Poor chap, he's got no father nor mother, and he's not such a very bad lodger, after all, tho he *does* get a little behindhand now and then, and tho he turns out every Sunday like a lord, 'with a shining back and empty belly.'

"There," said Mrs. Squallop, setting down on the table what she had brought for Titmouse, "there's a bit of supper for you; and you're welcome to it, I'm sure, Mr. Titmouse."

"Thank you,—I can't eat," said he, casting, however, upon the victuals a hungry eye, which belied what he said.

"Come, don't be ashamed—fall to work—it's good wholesome victuals," said she, lifting the table near to the edge of the bed, on the side of which he was sitting, and taking up the two shillings lying on the table—"and capital good beer, I warrant me you'll sleep like a top after it."

"You're uncommon kind, Mrs. Squallop; but I sha'n't get a wink of sleep to-night for thinking——"

"Oh, bother your thinking! Let me begin to see you eat a bit. Well, I suppose you don't like to eat and drink before me, so I'll go. I—I—dare say, Mr. Titmouse, you mean what's right and straightforward," she stammered.

"Yes, Mrs. Squallop—you may keep those two shillings; they're the last farthing I have left in the whole world."

"No—hem! hem!—ahem! I was just suddenly a-thinking—now can't you guess, Mr. Titmouse?"

"What, Mrs. Squallop?" inquired Titmouse, meekly but anxiously.

"Why—suppose now—if it were only to raise ten shillings with old Balls, round the corner, on one of those fine things of yours—your ring, say. Well, well—never mind—don't fear, I—I only thought—but never mind! It don't signify—good night! we can talk about that to-morrow—good-night—a good night's rest, Mr. Titmouse!"

"The beast! the fat old toad!" thought he, the instant that he had finished masticating what had been supplied to him by real charity and good nature,—"the vulgar wretch!—the nasty canting old hypocrite!—I saw what she was driving at all the while! She had her eyes on my ring! She'd have me pawn it at old Balls's. How I hate her! More than half my salary goes into her greasy pocket! Cuss me if I couldn't have kicked her down-stairs—porter, bread and cheese and all—while she was standing canting there. Take my ring! Lord!—" Here he began to undress. "Ha, I'm up to her; she'll be coming here to-morrow with that devil Thumbscrew, to distrain, I'll be sworn. Well—I'll take care of *these* anyhow; and kneeling down and unlocking his trunk he took out of it his guard chain, breast-pin, studs, and ring, carefully folded them up in paper, and depositing them in his trousers' pockets, resolved thenceforth their nightly resting-place should be—under his pillow; while during the day they should accompany his person whithersoever he went. Next, bethinking himself of the two or three important papers to which Mr. Gammon had referred, he folded them up in a half-sheet of writing-paper, which he proceeded to stitch carefully beneath the lining of his waistcoat; after which he blew out his slim candle and with a heavy sigh got into bed.

About six o'clock Titmouse rose and dressed himself; and, slipping noiselessly and swiftly down-stairs and out of the court, he reached Oxford Street just as the porter of Messrs. Tag-rag & Co. was opening the shop door, and commenced another joyous day in that delightful establishment. When his employer entered, it was with amiability unaltered, which his clerk resented as plainly as he dared.

"You're at liberty to take yourself off, sir, this very day, this moment, sir; and a good riddance," said Mr. Tag-rag bitterly, after demanding of Titmouse how he dared to give

himself such sullen airs; "and then we shall see how charming easy it is for gents like you to get another sitiwation, sir! Your looks and manner is quite a recommendation, sir! If I was you, sir, I'd raise my terms! You're worth double what I give, sir!" Titmouse made no reply. "What do you mean, sir, by not answering me, eh, sir?"

"I don't know what you'd have me say, sir; what am I to say, sir?" inquired Titmouse with a sigh.

"What, indeed! I should like to catch you! Say, indeed! Only say a word—and out you go, neck and crop. Attend to that old lady coming in, sir. And mind, sir, I've got my eye on you!"

When at length *this* day had come to a close, Titmouse, instead of repairing to his lodgings, set off, with a heavy heart, to pay a visit to Huckaback, whom he knew to have received his quarter's salary the day before, and from whom he faintly hoped to succeed in extorting some trifling loan.

"Oh! it's you, Titmouse, is it?" he commenced, coldly.

"Yes. I—I just want to speak a word with you—only a word or two, Hucky, if you aren't busy?"

"Why, I was just going to go—but what d'ye want, Titmouse?" he inquired in a freezing manner.

"Why, Huck, I know you're a good-natured chap—you *couldn't*, just for a short time, lend me ten shill——"

"No, curse me if I can: and that's flat!" briskly interrupted Huckaback, finding his worst suspicions confirmed.

"O Huck, Huck, if you only knew what a poor devil——"

"Yes, that's what I was a-saying; but it a'n't 'poor devils' one lends money to, so easily, I warrant me; tho you *a'n't* such a poor devil—you're only shamming! Where's your guard-chain, your studs, your breast-pin, your ring, and all that? Sell em? If not, anyhow, *pawn* 'em. Can't eat your cake and have it; fine back must have empty belly with us sort of chaps."

"If you'll only be so uncommon kind as to lend me—this once—ten shillings," continued Titmouse in an imploring tone, "I'll bind myself by a solemn oath, to pay you the very first moment I get what's due to me from Tag-rag & Co., and if anything *should* ever come up from Messrs. Quirk, Gam——"

(At this moment a sudden thought passed thro the mind of Mr. Huckaback.)

"Ah, Titmouse, you're civil enough *now*, and would *promise* anything," said he; "but when you get your money you'd forget everything about it——"

"Forget my promise! Dear Hucky! only try me—do try me but once, that's all! 'Pon my precious life, ten shillings is worth more to me now than a hundred pounds may be by and by."

"Ay, so you say *now;* but d'ye mean to tell me that, if I was now to advance you ten shillings out of my poor little salary," continued Huckaback apparently carelessly, "you'd, for instance, pay me a hundred pounds out of your thousands!"

"O Lord! only you try me—do try me!" said Titmouse, eagerly.

"Oh, I dare say," interrupted Huckaback, smiling incredulously, and chinking some money in his trousers pocket. Titmouse heard it, and immediately swore a tremendous oath that if Huckaback would that evening lend him ten shillings, he, Titmouse, would give him one hundred pounds out of the very first moneys he got from the estate.

"Ah, that's something reasonable-like, Titty! and to meet you like a friend, I'll take fifty pounds instead of a hundred; so now, here goes, a bit of paper for ten shillings, ha, ha!" and taking a pen, after a pause, in which he called to mind as much of the phraseology of money securities as he could, he drew up the following stringent document:

"*Know all Men* That you are Bound to *Mr. R. Huckaback* Promising the *Bearer* (on *Demand*) To Pay Fifty Pounds in cash out of the Estate, *if you get it.* (Value received.)

"(Witness,) 22d July, 18—.

"R. HUCKABACK."

"There, Titty—if you are an honest man, and would do as you would be done by," said Huckaback, after signing his own name as above, handing the pen to Titmouse, "sign that; just to show your honor, like—for, in course, I sha'n't ever come on you for the money—get as much as you may."

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH THE SUN BEGINS TO SHINE FOR THE HERO THROUGH THE PLEASANT MEDIUM OF MR. GAMMON

Some two or three nights after the little transaction Huckaback called upon Titmouse, and after greeting him rather cordially, told him that he had come to put him up to a trick upon the Saffron Hill people, that would tickle them into a little activity in his affairs. The trick was—the sending of the following letter to those gentlemen:

"To Messrs. Quirk & Co.

"Gents:—Am Sorry *to* Trouble You, But Being *Drove quite desperate* at my Troubles (which have brot me to my Last Penny a Week ago) and Mrs. Squallop my Landlady wd distrain on Me only that there is nothing to distrain on, Am Determined to Go Abroad in a Week's Time, and shall Never come Any More back again with Great Grief wh Is What I now Write To tell You of (Hoping you will please Take No notice of it) So Need give Yourselves No Further Concern with my Concerns Seeing the Estate is Not To Be Had and Am Sorry you Shd Have Had so Much trouble with My Affairs wh cd not Help. Shd have Much liked The Thing, only it Was Not worth Stopping For, or Would, but Since it Was not God's Will be Done *which it will.* Have raised a Trifle On my Future Prospects (wh am Certain There is Nothing In) from a *True Friend*" [need it be guessed at whose instance these words found their way into the letter?] "wh was certainly uncommon inconvenient to That Person But Hd do Anything to Do me good As he says Am going to raise A Little More from a Gent That does *Things of That Nature* wh will help me with Expense in Going Abroad (which place I Never mean to Return from). Have fixed for the 10th To Go on wh Day Shall Take leave Of Mr. Tag-rag (who on my Return Shall be glad to See Buried

or in the Workhouse). Have wrote This letter Only to Save Yr Respectable Selves trouble wh Trust You wd not have Taken.

"And Remain,
"Gents,
"Yr humble Unworthy servant,
"T. TITMOUSE."

"*P. S.*—Hope you will Particularly Remember me to Mr. Gammon. What is to become of me, know nothing, being so troubled. Am Humbly Determined not to employ any Gents in this matter except yr most Respectable House, and shd be most Truly Sorry to Go Abroad whh *am really Often thinking of in Earnest.* (Unless something Speedily Turns Up favourable), T. T.—Shd like (by the way) to know if you shd be so Disposed what yr respe house wd take for my Chances Down (*Out and out*) In a Round Sum (*Ready Money*) And hope if they Write It will be by next Post or Shall be Gone Abroad."

Old Mr. Quirk, as soon as he had finished the perusal of this skilful document, started, a little disturbed, from his seat and bustled into Mr. Gammon's room with Mr. Titmouse's open letter in his hand.—"Gammon," said he, "just cast your eye over this, will you? Really, we must look after Titmouse, or he'll be gone!" Mr. Gammon read deliberately through it, and then looked up at his fidgety partner and smiled.

"Well, Gammon, I really think—eh? Don't you——"

"Upon my word, Mr. Quirk, this nearly equals his former letter! Go abroad! Ridiculous pretense! Pshaw!—That the wretch is in great distress is very probable. But there *is* a point that may be worth considering—I mean the fellow's hint about borrowing money on his prospects."

"Yes, to be sure—the very thing that struck *me.* I never thought much about the *other* part of the letter—all stuff about going abroad—pho!—But to be sure, if he's trying to raise money, he may get into keen hands.—Do you really think he *has?*

"Oh, no—of course, it's only a little lie of his—or he must have found out some greater fool than himself, which I had not

supposed possible. But however that may be, I really think, Mr. Quirk, it's high time that we should take some decided step. We'd better send for Titmouse, and manage him a little more—discreetly, eh? We did not exactly hit it off

"It's high time that we should take some decided step."

last time, did we?" said Gammon, smiling rather sarcastically. "We must keep him at Tag-rag's if the thing *can* be done, for the present at all events."

"To be sure; he couldn't then come buzzing about us, like a gadfly; he'd drive us mad in a week, I'm sure."

"Well, then," continued Gammon, "one or the other of us shall undertake Titmouse, solely and singly. Pray, for Heaven's sake, tackle him yourself—a disagreeable duty! You know, my dear sir, how invariably I leave everything of real importance and difficulty to your very superior tact and experience."

"Come, come, Gammon, that's a drop of sweet oil——"

"Upon my word and honor, Mr. Quirk, I'm in earnest. Pshaw!—and you must know it. I know you too well, my dear sir, to attempt to——"

"Certainly, I must say, those must get up *very* early that can find Caleb Quirk napping,"—Gammon felt at that moment that for several years *he* must have been a very early riser. And so the matter was at last arranged in the manner which Gammon had wished and determined upon, *i.e.*, that Mr. Titmouse should be left entirely to his management; and, after some little discussion as to the time and manner of the meditated advances, the partners parted.

On Friday night, the 28th July, 18—, the state of Mr. Titmouse's affairs was this: He owed his landlady £1 9s.; his washerwoman, 6s.; his tailor, £1 8s.—in all, three guineas, besides 10s. to Huckaback (for Tittlebat's notion was that on repayment at any time of 10s., Huckaback would be bound to deliver up to him the document or voucher which he had given him), and a weekly accruing rent of 7s. to his landlady, besides some very small sums for washing, tea, bread, and butter, &c. To meet these serious liabilities, he had—*not one farthing.* So he was at last forced to make the much dreaded visit to Balls the pawnbroker.

On returning to his lodgings with £3 3s., the amount of the loan upon his beloved jewelry, Titmouse found a line from Thumbscrew, his landlady's broker, informing him that, unless by ten o'clock on the next morning his arrears of rent were paid, she should distrain, and that she would also give him notice to quit at the end of the week, since nothing could induce her to give him further time. He sat down in dismay on reading this threatening document; and, in sitting down, his eyes fell on a bit of paper lying on the floor, which must have been thrust under the door. From the marks on it, it was evident that he must have trod upon

it in entering. It proved to be a summons from the Court of Requests, for £1 8s. due to Job Cox, his tailor. He deposited it mechanically on the table, and for a minute he dared hardly breathe.

What was he to do? Why had he been born? Why was he so much more persecuted and miserable than any one else? Visions of his ring, his breast pin, his studs, stuck in a bit of card with their price written above, and hanging exposed to his view in old Balls's window, almost frenzied him. Thoughts such as these at length began to suggest others of a dreadful nature. . . . The means at that instant within his reach. . . . A sharp knock at the door startled him out of the stupor into which he was sinking. He listened for a moment, as if he were not certain that the sound was a real one. There seemed a ton-weight upon his heart, which a mighty sigh could lift for an instant, but not remove; and he was in the act of heaving a second such sigh, as he languidly opened the door—expecting to encounter Mr. Thumbscrew or some of his myrmidons, who might not know of his recent settlement with his landlady.

"Is this Mr.—Tit—Titmouse's!" inquired a genteel-looking young man.

"Yes," replied Titmouse, sadly.

"Are you Mr. Titmouse?"

"Yes," he replied more faintly than before.

"Oh—I have brought you, sir, a letter from Mr. Gammon. He said he hoped you'd send him an answer by the first morning's post."

"Yes—oh—I see—certainly—to be sure—with pleasure—how is Mr. Gammon?—uncommon kind of him—very humble respects to him—take care to answer it," stammered Titmouse in a breath, hardly knowing whether he was standing on his head or his heels, and not quite certain where he was.

"Good evening, sir," replied the stranger, evidently a little surprised at Titmouse's manner, and withdrew. Titmouse shut his door. With prodigious trepidation of hand and flutter of spirits, he opened the letter—an enclosure meeting his eyes in the shape of a bank-note.

"O Lord!" he murmured, turning white as the sheet of paper he held. Then the letter dropped from his hand, and

he stood as if stupefied for some moments; but presently rapture darted through him; a five-pound bank-note was in his hand, and it had been enclosed in the following latter:

"35, *Thavies' Inn, 29th July*, 18—.

"My Dear Mr. Titmouse:

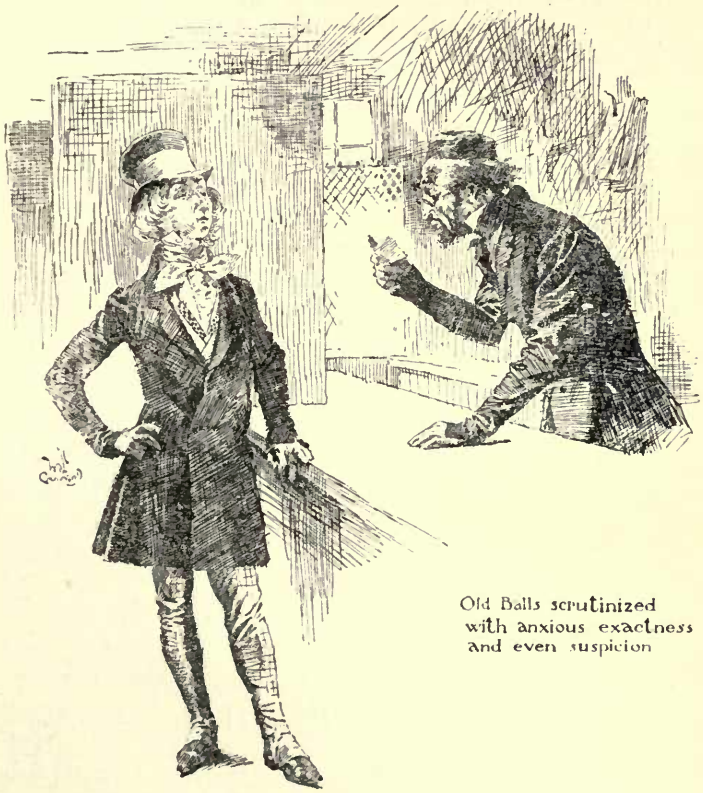
"Your last note addressed to our firm has given me the greatest pain, and I hasten, on my return from the country, to forward you the enclosed trifle, which I sincerely hope will be of temporary service to you. May I beg the favor of your company on Sunday evening next, at seven o'clock, to take a glass of wine with me? I shall be quite alone and disengaged; and may have it in my power to make you some important communications concerning matters in which, I assure you, I feel a very deep interest on your account. Begging the favor of an early answer to-morrow morning, I trust you will believe me, ever, my dear sir, your most faithful humble servant,

"Oily Gammon."

If his room had been large enough to admit of it, Titmouse would have skipped round it again and again in his frantic ecstasy. At length he hastily crumpled up the bank-note in his hand, clapped his hat on his head, blew out his candle, rushed down-stairs as if a mad dog were at his heels, and in three or four minutes' time was standing breathless before old Balls, whom he almost electrified by asking, with an eager and joyous air, for a return of the articles which he had only an hour before pawned with him; at the same time laying down the duplicates and the bank-note. The latter old Balls scrutinized with most anxious exactness, and even suspicion—but it seemed perfectly unexceptionable; so he gave him back his precious ornaments and the change out of his note, *minus* a trifling sum for interest.

By six o'clock the next morning, Titmouse had, with his own hand, dropped his answer into the letter-box upon the door of Mr. Gammon's chambers in Thavies' Inn; in which answer he had, with numerous expressions of profound respect and gratitude, accepted Mr. Gammon's polite invitation. A very happy man felt Titmouse, as he returned to Oxford Street; entering Messrs. Tag-rag's premises with alacrity,

and volunteering his assistance in numerous things beyond his usual province, with singular briskness and energy. This change of manners Tag-rag, however, looked upon as as-



Old Balls scrutinized with anxious exactness and even suspicion

sumed only to affront *him*, seeing nothing but impertinence and defiance in all that Titmouse did—as if the nearer Titmouse got to the end of his bondage—*i.e.* the 10th of August—the lighter-hearted he grew.

On the ensuing Sunday, punctual to his appointment, as the clock struck seven he made his appearance at Mr. Gammon's and was speedily ushered into his room. Mr. Gammon, who was sitting reading the *Sunday Flash* at a table on which stood a couple of decanters, several wine-glasses, and two or three dishes of fruit, rose and received his distinguished visitor with the most delightful affability.

"I am most happy, Mr. Titmouse, to see you in this friendly way," said he, shaking him by the hand.

"Oh, don't name it, sir," quoth Titmouse rather indistinctly, and hastily running his hand through his hair.

"I've nothing, you see, to offer you but a little fruit, and a glass of fair port or sherry."

"Particularly fond of *them*, sir," replied Titmouse, endeavoring to clear his throat; for in spite of a strong effort to appear at his ease, he was unsuccessful; so that when Gammon's keen eye glanced at the bedizened figure of his guest, a smile passed over his face without having been observed. "*This*," thought he, "is the writer of the dismal epistle of the other day, announcing his desperation and destitution.

"Your health, Mr. Titmouse!—help yourself!" said Mr. Gammon, in a cheerful and cordial tone. Titmouse, pouring out a glass only three-quarters full, raised it to his lips with a slightly tremulous hand, and returned Mr. Gammon's salutation.

"You see, Mr. Titmouse, mine's only a small bachelor's establishment, and I cannot put my old servant out of the way by having my friends to dinner."

"Oh, sir, 'pon my honor, I beg you won't name it—all one to me, sir!—Beautiful wine this, sir."

"Pretty fair, I think—certainly rather old—but what fruit will you take, currants or cherries?"

"Why—a—I've so lately dined," replied Titmouse, alluding to an exceedingly slight repast at a coffee-shop about two o'clock. He could have preferred the cherries, but did not feel quite at his ease how to dispose of the stones nicely—gracefully—so he took a very few red currants upon his plate, and eat them slowly, and with a modest air.

"Well, Mr. Titmouse," commenced Gammon with an air of concern, "I was really much distressed by your last letter. I had no idea that you were reduced to such straits."

"Quite dreadful, sir—'pon my soul, dreadful; and such usage at Mr. Tag-rag's!"

"But you mustn't think of going abroad—away from all your friends, Mr. Titmouse."

"*Abroad*, sir!" interrupted Titmouse with anxious but subdued eagerness; "never thought of such a thing!"

"Oh! I—I thought——"

"There isn't a word of truth in it, sir; and if you've heard so it must have been from that oudacious fellow that called on you—he's *such* a liar!" said Titmouse with a confident air, quite losing sight of his own letter—"No, sir—shall stay and stick to friends that stick to me."

"Take another glass of wine, Mr. Titmouse," interrupted Gammon cordially, and Titmouse obeyed him; but while he was pouring it out, a sudden recollection of his letter flashed across his mind, satisfied him that he stood detected in a flat lie before Mr. Gammon; and he blushed scarlet.

"Do you like the sherry?" inquired Gammon, perfectly aware of what was passing through the mind of his guest, and wishing to divert his thoughts. Titmouse answered in the affirmative, and proceeded to pour forth such a number of apologies for his own behavior at Saffron Hill, and Huckaback's on the subsequent occasion, that Gammon found it difficult to stop him, tho over and over again assuring him all had been forgiven and forgotten. Then Titmouse came to the remittance of the five pounds——

"Don't mention it, my dear sir," interrupted Gammon very blandly; "it gave me, I assure you, far greater satisfaction to send it than you to receive it. I hope it has a little relieved you?"

"I think so, sir! I was, 'pon my life, on my last legs."

"When things come to the worst, they often mend, Mr. Titmouse! I told Mr. Quirk that, however imprudent it might be in us to go so far, I could not help relieving your present necessities, even out of my own resources."

[Oh, Gammon, Gammon!]

"How uncommon kind of you, sir!" exclaimed Titmouse.

"Not in the least, my dear sir—(pray fill another glass, Mr. Titmouse!) You see, Mr. Quirk is quite a man of business—and our profession too often affords instances of persons whose hearts contract as their purses expand, Mr. Titmouse

"Take another glass of wine, Mr. Titmouse."

—ha! ha! Indeed, those who make their money as hard as Mr. Quirk, are apt to be slow at parting with it, and *very* suspicious."

"Well, I hope no offense, sir; but really I thought as much, directly I saw that old gent."

"Ah—but *now* he is embarked, heart and soul, in the affair."

"No! *Is* he really, sir?" inquired Titmouse, eagerly.

"That is," replied Gammon quickly, "so long as I am at his elbow, urging him on—for he wants some one who—hem! In fact, my dear sir, ever since I had the good fortune to make the discovery, which happily brought us acquainted with each other, Mr. Titmouse," [it was old Quirk who had made the discovery, and Gammon had for a long time thrown cold water on it,] "I have been doing all I could with him, and I trust I may say have at last got the thing into shape."

"I'll take my oath, sir," said Titmouse excitedly. "I never was so much struck with any one in all my born days as I was with you, sir, when you first came to my emp—to Mr. Tag-rag's, sir—Lord, sir, how uncommon sharp you seemed!" Gammon smiled with a deprecating air, and sipped his wine in silence; but there was a great sweetness in the expression of his countenance. Poor Titmouse's doubts, hopes, and fears were rapidly subsiding into a *reverence* for Gammon! . . .

"I certainly quite agree with Mr. Quirk," said Gammon presently, "that the difficulties in our way are of the most serious description. To speak, for an instant only, of the risk we ourselves incur personally—would you believe it, my dear Mr. Titmouse?—in such a disgraceful state are our laws, that we can't gratify our feelings by taking up your cause without rendering ourselves liable to imprisonment for Heaven knows how long, and a fine that would be ruin itself, if we should be found out!—Champerty and Maintenance, you know."

Titmouse continued silent, his wine-glass in his hand arrested on its way to his mouth, as he stared with a kind of terror upon Mr. Gammon. "*Are* we, then, unreasonable, my dear sir, in entreating you to be cautious, when not only your own best interests, but our characters, liberties,

and fortunes are staked on the issue of this great enterprise? I am sure," continued Gammon, with great emotion, "you will feel for us, Mr. Titmouse. I see you do!" Gammon put his hand over his eyes, in order, apparently, to conceal his emotion, but really to observe what effect he had produced upon Titmouse. The conjoint influence of Gammon's wine and eloquence not a little agitated Titmouse, in whose eyes stood tears.

"I'll do anything—anything, sir," he almost sobbed.

"You see, I have the utmost confidence in you, and had so from the first happy moment when we met; but Mr. Quirk is rather sus——In short, to prevent misunderstanding, Mr. Quirk is anxious that you should give a *written* promise. [Titmouse looked eagerly about for writing materials.] No, not now, but in a day or two's time. I confess, my dear Mr. Titmouse, if *I* might have decided on the matter, I should have been satisfied with your verbal promise; but I must say Mr. Quirk's gray hairs seem to have made him quite—eh! you understand? Don't you think so, Mr. Titmouse?"

"To be sure! 'pon my honor, Mr. Gammon!" replied Titmouse; not very distinctly understanding, however, what he was so energetically assenting to.

"I dare say you wonder why we wish you to stop a few months longer at your present hiding-place—at Tag-rag's?"

"Can't possibly!—after the 10th of next month, sir," replied Titmouse, eagerly.

"But as soon as we begin to fire off our guns against the enemy—Lord, my dear sir, if they could only find out, you know, where to get at you—you would never live to enjoy your ten thousand a year! They'd either poison or kidnap you—get you out of the way, unless you keep out of *their* way; and if you will but consent to keep snug at Tag-rag's for a while, who'd suspect where you was? We could easily arrange with your friend Tag-rag that you should——"

"My stars! I'd give something to hear you tell Tag-rag—why, I wonder what he'll do!"

"Make you very comfortable, and let you have your own way in everything—that you may rely upon!"

"Go to the play, for instance, whenever I want, and do all that sort of thing?"

"Nay, try! anything!—And as for money, I've persuaded Mr. Quirk to consent to our advancing you a certain sum per week, from the present time, while the cause is going on,"—(Titmouse's heart began to beat fast)—"in order to place you above absolute inconvenience; and when you consider the awful sums we shall have to disburse—cash out of pocket for court-fees and other indispensable matters, I should candidly say that four thousand pounds of hard cash out of pocket, advanced by our firm in your case, would be the very lowest." (Titmouse stared at him with an expression of stupid wonder.) "Yes—four thousand pounds, Mr. Titmouse, at the very least—the *very* least." Again he paused, keenly scrutinizing Titmouse's features by the light of the candles, which just then were brought in. "You seem surprised, Mr. Titmouse."

"Why—why—where's all the money to come from, sir?" exclaimed Titmouse, aghast.

"Ah! that is indeed a fearful question," replied Gammon, with a very serious air; "but at my request, our firm has agreed to make the necessary advances; and also to supply your necessities liberally in the mean time."

"Won't you take another glass of wine, Mr. Gammon?" suddenly inquired Titmouse, with a confident air.

"With all my heart, Mr. Titmouse! I'm delighted that you approve of it. I paid enough for it, I can warrant you."

"Cuss me if ever I tasted such wine! Uncommon! Come—no heel-taps, Mr. Gammon—here goes—let's drink—success to the affair!"

"With all my heart, my dear sir—with all my heart. Success to the thing—amen!" and Gammon drained his glass; so did Titmouse. "Ah! Mr. Titmouse, you'll soon have wine enough to float a frigate—and indeed why not—with ten thousand a year?"

"And all the back rents, you know—ha! ha!"

"Yes—to be sure!—the back-rents! The sweetest estate that is to be found in all Yorkshire! Gracious, Mr. Titmouse!" continued Gammon, with an excited air—"What may you not do? Go where you like—do what you like—get into Parliament—marry some lovely woman!"

"Lord, Mr. Gammon!—you a'n't dreaming? Nor I? But now, in course, *you* must be paid handsome for your trou-

ble!—Only say how much—Name your sum! What you please! If you only give me all you've said."

"A single year's income, only—ten thousand pounds will hardly——"

"Ten thousand pounds! By jingo, that *is* a slice out of the cake! O Lord!" quoth Titmouse, looking aghast.

"A mere crumb, my dear sir!—a trifle! Why, *we* are going to give *you* that sum at least every year—and indeed it was suggested to our firm, that, unless you gave us at least a sum of twenty-five thousand pounds—in fact, we are recommended to look out for some other heir."

"Well—curse me, if you sha'n't do what you like!—Give me your hand, and do what you like, Mr. Gammon!"

"Thank you, Mr. Titmouse! How I like a glass of wine with a friend in this quiet way!—you'll always find me rejoiced to show——"

"Your hand! By George—Didn't I take a liking to you from the first? But to speak my mind a bit—as for Mr. Quirk—excuse me—but he's a cur—cur—mudg—mudg—mudg—eon—hem!"

"Hope you've not been so imprudent, my dear Titmouse," threw in Mr. Gammon, rather anxiously, "as to borrow money—eh?"

"Devil knows, and devil cares! No stamp, I know—bang up to the mark,"—here he winked an eye, and put his finger to his nose—"wide awake—Huck—uck—uck—uck! how his name sti—sticks. Your hand, Mr. Gammon—here—this, this way—what are you bobbing your head about for? Ah, ha! —The floor—'pon my life—how funny—it's like being at sea —up, down—oh, dear!"—he clapped his hand to his head.

"I'm afraid the room's rather close, Mr. Titmouse," hastily observed Gammon, perceiving from Titmouse's sudden paleness and silence but too evident symptoms that his powerful intellect was for a while paralyzed. Gammon started to the window and opened it. Paler, however, and paler became Titmouse. Gammon's game was up much sooner than he had calculated on.

"Mrs. Brown! Mrs. Brown! order a cab instantly, and tell Tomkins,"—that was the inner porter—"to get his son ready to go home with this gentleman—he's not very well." It was in truth, all up with Titmouse—at least for a while.

CHAPTER VII

SHOWS HOW MR. TAG-RAG, AFTER CHANGING HIS OPINION OF THE HERO, BEGINS TO DREAM DREAMS

MR. TITMOUSE did not get out of bed on the Tuesday till past twelve o'clock, when, in a very rickety condition, he made his appearance at the shop.

"What are you doing here, sir?—You're no longer in my employment, sir," exclaimed Tag-rag, white with rage.

"Sir!" faintly exclaimed Titmouse, hat in hand.

"Very much obliged, sir—very! by the offer of your valuable services," said Tag-rag. "But—*that's* the way out again, sir—that!—there!—good morning, sir—good morning, sir!—that's the way out"—and he egged on Titmouse, till he had got him fairly into the street. Oh, that Mr. Gammon had witnessed the scene—and so have been satisfied that it had been Tag-rag who had put an end to his service!

The next day Mr. Gammon made his appearance at the establishment and inquired for Mr. Tag-rag.

"What did you please to want, sir?" inquired Mr. Tag-rag, with a would-be resolute air, twirling round his watch-key with some energy.

"Only a few minutes' conversation, sir, if you please," said Mr. Gammon, with such a significant manner as a little disturbed Mr. Tag-rag; who, with an ill-supported sneer, bowed very low, and led the way to his own little room.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Tag-rag," commenced Gammon, with his usual elegant and feeling manner, "that any misunderstanding should have arisen between you and Mr. Titmouse."

"You're a lawyer, sir, I suppose?" Mr. Gammon bowed. "Then you must know, sir, that there are always two sides to a quarrel."

"Yes—you are right, Mr. Tag-rag; and, having already

heard Mr. Titmouse's version, may I be favored with *your* account of your reasons for dismissing him?"

"What did I dismiss him for?—Haven't I eyes and ears?—First and foremost he's the most odious-mannered fellow I ever came near—and—he hadn't a shirt to his back when I first took him—the ungrateful wretch!—Sir, it's not against the law, I suppose, to *hate* a man;—and if it isn't, how I hate Titmouse!"

"Mr. Tag-rag"—said Gammon, lowering his voice, and looking very earnestly at his companion—"can I say a word to you in confidence—the strictest confidence!"

"What is it about, sir?" inquired Tag-rag, with an apprehensive air.

"I dare say you may have felt, perhaps, rather surprised at the interest which I—in fact our office, the office of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, in Saffron Hill—appear to have taken in Mr. Titmouse."

"Why, sir, it's *your* lookout to see how you're to be paid for what you're doing—and I dare say lawyers generally keep a pretty sharp lookout in that direction."

Gammon smiled and continued—"It may, perhaps, a little surprise you, Mr. Tag-rag, to hear that Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse is at this moment probably the very luckiest man in this kingdom."

"Why—you don't mean to say he's drawn a prize in the lottery?" exclaimed Tag-rag, pricking up his ears.

"Pho! my dear sir, *that* is a mere trifle compared with the good fortune that has befallen him. I solemnly assure you that I believe he will turn out to be the undoubted owner of an estate worth at least ten thousand a year, besides a vast accumulation of ready money!"

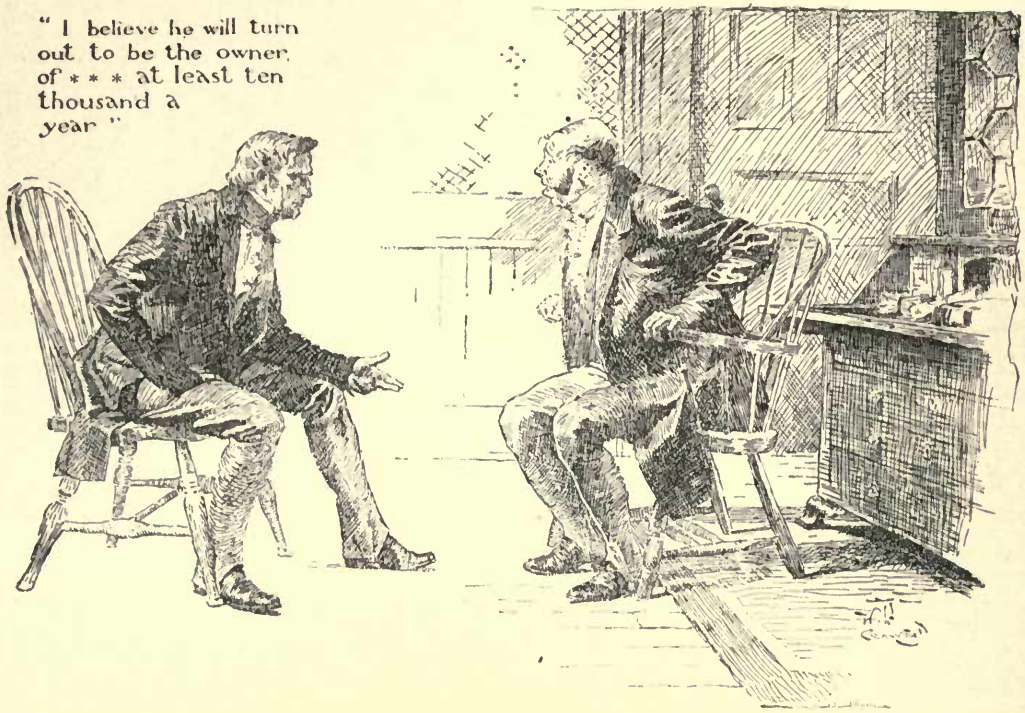
"Ten thousand a year, sir!—My Titmouse!—Tittlebat Titmouse!—Ten thousand a year!" faltered Tag-rag, after a pause, having gone as pale as death.

"I have as little doubt of the fact, as I have that you yesterday turned him out of doors, Mr. Tag-rag!"

"But who could have dreamt it? How was—*really*, Mr. Gammon!—how *was* I to know it?"

"That's the fact, however," said Gammon, shrugging his shoulders. Tag-rag wriggled about in his chair, put his hands in and out of his pockets, scratched his head, and

"I believe he will turn out to be the owner of * * * at least ten thousand a year"



continued staring open-mouthed at the bearer of such astounding intelligence. "Perhaps, however, all this is meant as a joke, sir"—said he—"and if so—it's—it's—a very——"

"It's one of his solicitors who were fortunate enough to make the discovery, that tells you. I repeat what I have already told you, Mr. Tag-rag—that an estate of ten thousand a year is the very least——"

"Why, that's two hundred thousand pounds, sir!"—exclaimed Tag-rag, with an awe-struck air.

"At the very least——"

"Lord, Mr. Gammon!—Excuse me, sir, but how *did* you find it out?"

"Mere accident—a mere accidental discovery, sir, in the course of other professional inquiries!"

"And does Mr. Titmouse know it?"

"Ever since the day after that on which I called on him here!" replied Gammon pointedly.

"You don't say so!"—exclaimed Tag-rag, and then continued silent for nearly half a minute, evidently amazed beyond all power of expression.

"Well,"—at length he observed—"I *will* say this—he's the most amiable young gentleman—the *very amiablest* young gentleman I—ever—came near. I always thought there was something uncommon superior-like in his looks."

"Yes—I think he *is* of a rather amiable turn," observed Gammon, with an expressive smile—"and so intelligent——"

"Intelligent! Mr. Gammon! you should only have known him as I have known him!—Well, to be sure I—Lord! His only fault was that he was above his business; but when one comes to think of it, how could it be otherwise? From the time I first clapped eyes on him—I—I—knew he was—a superior article—quite superior—you know what I mean, sir?—He couldn't help it of course!—to be sure—he never was much liked by the other young men; but that was jealousy!—all jealousy; I saw that all the while." Here he looked at the door, and added in a very low tone, "Many sleepless nights has their bad treatment of Mr. Titmouse cost me!—Even I, now and then, used to look and speak sharply to him—just to keep him, as it were, down to the mark of the others—he was so uncommon handsome and

genteel in his manner, sir. Hang me, if I didn't tell Mrs. Tag-rag the very first day he came to me, that he was a gentleman born—or ought to have been one."

"*Now*, may I take it for granted, Mr. Tag-rag, that we understand each other?" replied Gammon.

"Yes, sir," replied Tag-rag meekly. "But do you think Mr. Titmouse will ever forgive or forget the little misunderstanding we've lately had? If I could but explain to him how I have been acting a part toward him—all for his good!"

"You may have opportunities for doing so, if you are really so disposed, Mr. Tag-rag; for I have something seriously to propose to you. Circumstances render it desirable that for some little time this important affair should be kept as quiet as possible; and it is Mr. Titmouse's wish and ours—as his confidential professional advisers—that for some few months he should continue in your establishment, and apparently in your service as before."

"In my service!—my service!" interrupted Tag-rag, opening his eyes to their utmost. "I sha'n't know how to behave in my own premises! Have a man with ten thousand a year behind my counter, sir? I might as well have the Lord Mayor! Sir, it can't—it can't be. Now, if Mr. Titmouse chose to become a *partner* in the house—ay, there might be something in that—he needn't have any trouble—be only a sleeping partner." Tag-rag warmed with the thought. "Really, sir, that wouldn't be so much amiss—would it?" Gammon assured him that it was out of the question; and gave him some of the reasons for the proposal which he (Mr. Gammon) had been making. While Gammon fancied that Tag-rag was paying profound attention to what he was saying, Tag-rag's thoughts had shot far ahead. He had an only child—a daughter, about twenty years old—Miss Tabitha Tag-rag; and the delightful possibility of her by and by becoming Mrs. Titmouse put her amiable parent into a perspiration. Mr. Gammon, having arranged everything exactly as he had desired, and having again enjoined Mr. Tag-rag to absolute secrecy, took his departure. Tag-rag attended him with extreme obsequiousness to the door, then he clapped his hat on his head, and saying that he should soon be back, hurried out to call upon his future

son-in-law, full of affectionate anxiety concerning his health —and vowing within himself that henceforth it should be the study of his life to make his daughter and Titmouse happy!

He found Titmouse not at home; so he left a most particularly civil message with Mrs. Squallop to the effect that he, Mr. Tag-rag, should be only too happy to see Mr. Titmouse at No. 375 Oxford Street whenever it might suit his convenience; that he had something very particular to say to him about the unpleasant and unaccountable occurrence of yesterday; that he was most deeply concerned to hear of Mr. Titmouse's indisposition, and anxious to learn from himself that he had recovered, etc. etc. etc.

Twice afterward during the day did Tag-rag call at Titmouse's lodgings—but in vain. How totally changed had become all his feelings toward that gentleman within the last few hours! The more Tag-rag reflected on Titmouse's conduct, the more he saw in it to approve of. How steady and regular had he been in his habits! how civil and obliging! how patient of rebuke! how pleasing in his manners to the customers! Tag-rag was now ready to forget and forgive all—he had never meant any harm to Titmouse. He believed that poor Tittlebat was an orphan, poor soul! alone in the wide world—*now* he would become the prey of designing strangers. Tag-rag did not like the appearance of Gammon. No doubt that person would try and ingratiate himself as much as possible with Titmouse! Then Titmouse was remarkably good-looking. "I wonder what Tabby will think of him when she sees him!" How anxious Tittlebat must be to see her—*his* daughter! How could Tag-rag make Tittlebat's stay at his premises agreeable and delightful? He would discharge the first of his young men that did not show Titmouse proper respect. What low lodgings poor Tittlebat lived in! Why could he not take up his quarters at Satin Lodge? They always had a nice spare bedroom. Ah! *that* would be a stroke! How Tabby could endear herself to him! What a number of things Mrs. Tag-rag could do to make him comfortable!

That same evening Mrs. and Miss Tag-rag were sitting in the front parlor, intending to take tea as soon as Mr. Tag-rag should have arrived. The skinny little Miss Tag-

rag sat at the worn-out, jingling pianoforte, playing—oh, horrid and doleful sound!—*The Battle of Prague.* Mrs. Tag-rag, a fat, showily-dressed woman of about fifty, her cap having a prodigious number of artificial flowers in it, sat reading a profitable volume entitled *Groans from the Bottomless Pit to Awaken Sleeping Sinners*, by the Rev. DISMAL HORROR—a rousing young dissenting preacher lately come into that neighborhood, who had almost frightened into fits half the women and children, and one or two old men, of his congregation.

"Well, Dolly, how are you to-night?" inquired Tag-rag, with unusual briskness, on entering the room.

"Tolerable, thank you, Tag," replied Mrs. Tag-rag mournfully, with a sigh, closing the cheerful volume she had been perusing.

"And how are *you*, Tabby?" said Tag-rag, addressing his daughter. "Come and kiss me, you little slut—come!"

"No, I sha'n't, pa! Do let me go on with my practising" —and twang! went those infernal keys.

"D'ye hear, Tab? Come and kiss me you little minx——"

"Really, pa, how provoking—just as I am in the middle of the *Cries of the Wounded!* I sha'n't—that's flat."

The doting parent would not, however, be denied; so he stepped to the piano, put his arm around his dutiful daughter's neck, kissed her fondly, and then stood for a moment behind her, admiring her brilliant execution of *The Trumpet of Victory*. Having changed his coat, and put on an old pair of shoes, Tag-rag was comfortable for the evening.

"Tabby plays wonderful well, Dolly, don't she?" said Tag-rag, as the tea things were being brought in, by way of beginning a conversation, while he drew his chair nearer to his wife.

"Ah! I'd a deal rather see her reading something serious —for life is short, Tag, and eternity's long."

"Botheration!—Stuff!—Tut!"

"You may find it out one day, my dear, when it's too late——"

"I'll tell you what, Dolly," said Tag-rag angrily, "you're coming a great deal too much of that sort of thing—my house is getting like a Methodist meeting-house. I can't

bear it,—I can't! What the deuce is coming to you all in these parts, lately?"

"Ah, Tag-rag," replied his wife, with a sigh, "I can only pray for you—I can do no more——"

"Oh!" exclaimed Tag-rag with an air of desperate disgust, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and stretching his legs to their utmost extent under the table. "I'll tell you what, Mrs. T.," he added, after a while, "too much of one thing is good for nothing; you may choke a dog with pudding:—I sha'n't renew my sitting at Mr. Horror's."

"Oh, dear, dear pa, do! That's a love of a pa!" interposed Miss Tag-rag, twirling around on her music-stool. "All Clapham's running after him—he's quite the rage! There's the Dugginses, the Pips, the Jones, the Maggots—and, really, Mr. Horror does preach such dreadful things, it's quite delightful to look round and see all the people with their eyes and mouths wide open—and ours is such a good pew for seeing—and Mr. Horror is such a bee—yeautiful preacher,—isn't he, ma?"

"Yes, love, he is—but I wish I could see you profit by him, preparing for death——"

"Why, ma, how *can* you go on in that ridiculous way? You know I'm not twenty yet!"

"Well, well! poor Tabby!"—here Mrs. Tag-rag's voice faltered—"a day will come, when——"

"Play me the *Devil among the Tailors* or *Copenhagen Waltz;* something of that sort, Tabby," said her father furiously, "or I shall be sick!—I can't bear it! Curse Mr. Hor——"

"Well!—Oh, my!—I never!—Mr. Tag-rag!" exclaimed his astounded wife.

"Play away, Tab, or I'll go and sit in the kitchen! They're cheerful *there!* The next time I come across Mr. Horror, if I don't give him a bit of my mind——" here he paused, and slapped his hand with much energy upon the table. Mrs. Tag-rag wiped her eyes, sighed, and resumed her book. Miss Tag-rag began to make tea, her papa gradually forgetting his rage, as he fixed his dull gray eyes fondly on the pert, skinny countenance of his daughter.

"By the way, Tag," exclaimed Mrs. Tag-rag suddenly, but in the same mournful tone, addressing her husband, "you haven't, of course, forgot the flowers for my new bonnet?"

"Never once thought of it," replied Tag-rag, doggedly.

"You haven't! Good gracious! what am I to go to chapel in next Sunday!" she exclaimed with sudden alarm, closing her book, "and our seat in the very front of the gallery—bless me! I shall have a hundred eyes on me!"

"Now that you're coming down a bit, and dropped out of the clouds, Dolly," said her husband, much relieved, "I'll tell you a bit of news that will, I fancy, rather——"

"Come! what is it, Tag?" eagerly inquired his wife.

"What should you say of a chance of a certain somebody" (here he looked unutterable things at his daughter) "that shall be nameless, becoming mistress of ten thousand a year."

"Why"—Mrs. Tag-rag changed color—"has any one fallen in love with Tab?"

"What should you say, Mrs. T., of our Tab marrying a man with ten thousand a year? There's for you! Isn't *that* better than all your——"

"Oh, Tag, don't say that; but"—here she hastily turned down the leaf of *Groans from the Bottomless Pit*, and tossed that inestimable work upon the sofa—"do tell me, lovey! what *are* you talking about?"

"What indeed, Dolly!—I'm going to have him here to dinner next Sunday."

Miss Tag-rag, having been listening with breathless eagerness to this little colloquy between her prudent and amiable parents, unconscious of what she was about, poured all the tea into the sugar-basin, instead of her papa's tea-cup.

"Have *who*, dear Tag?" inquired Mrs. Tag-rag impatiently.

"Who? Why, whom but my Tittlebat Titmouse! You've seen him, and heard me speak of him often, you know——"

"What!—*that* odious, nasty——"

"Hush, hush!" involuntarily exclaimed Tag-rag, with an apprehensive air—"That's all past and gone—I was always a little too hard on him. Well, at all events, he's turned up all of a sudden master of ten thousand a year. He has, indeed—may this piece of toast choke me if he hasn't!"

Mrs. Tag-rag and her daughter sat in speechless wonder.

"Where did he see Tab, Taggy?" inquired at length Mrs. Tag-rag.

"Oh—I—I—why—you see—I don't exactly think *that* signifies so much—He *will* see her, you know, next Sunday."

"So then he's positively coming?" inquired Mrs. Tag-rag with a fluttered air.

"Y—e—s—I've no doubt."

"But aren't we counting our chickens, Taggy, before they're hatched? If Titmouse is all of a sudden become such a catch, he'll be snapped up in a minute, you know of course——"

"Why, you see, Dolly—we're first in the market, I'm sure of that—his attorney tells me he's to be kept quite snug and quiet under my care for months, and see no one——"

"My gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Tag-rag, holding up both her hands—"If *that* don't look like a special interposition of Providence, now——"

"So *I* thought, Tabby, while Mr. Gammon was telling me!" replied her husband.

"Ah, Tag, there are many of 'em, if we were only to be on the lookout for them!"

"I see it all! It's designed by Providence to get them soon together! When once Mr. Titmouse gets sight of Tabby, and gets into her company—eh! Tab, lovey! *you'll* do the rest, hem!"

"La, pa! how you go on!" simpered Miss Tag-rag.

"You must do your part, Tab," said her father—"we'll do ours. He'll bite, you may depend on it, if you manage well!"

"What sort of a looking young man is he, dear pa?" inquired Miss Tag-rag blushing, and her heart fluttering very fast.

"Oh, you *must* have seen him, sweetest——"

"How could I ever notice any one of the lots of young men at the shop, pa?—I don't at all know him."

"Well—he's the handsomest, most genteel-looking young fellow I ever came across; he's long been an ornament to my establishment, for his good looks and civil and obliging manners—quite a treasure! You should have seen how he *took* with ladies of rank always!——"

"Dear me," interrupted Mrs. Tag-rag, anxiously addressing her daughter, "I hope, Tabby, that Miss Nix will send home your lilac-colored frock by next Sunday!"

"If she *don't*, ma, I'll take care she never makes anything more for *me*, that's poz!" replied Miss Tag-rag earnestly.

CHAPTER VIII

RELATES HOW MR. TAG-RAG CONVINCES THE HERO OF THE GENUINENESS OF HIS AFFECTION, WITH MR. GAMMON'S COMMENTS THEREUPON

TITMOUSE, about half-past nine o'clock on the ensuing morning, was sitting in his little room in a somewhat troubled humor, musing on many things, when a knock at his door started him out of his reverie. There stood, on opening it, Mr. Tag-rag!

"Your most obedient, sir," commenced that gentleman, in a subdued and obsequious manner, plucking off his hat the instant he saw Titmouse. "I hope you're better, sir! —Been very uneasy, sir, about you."

"Please to walk in, sir," replied Titmouse, not a little flustered—"I'm better, sir, thank you. But when I was in your employ——"

"*Was* in my employ!" interrupted Tag-rag with a sigh, gazing earnestly at him—"It's no use trying to hide it any longer! I've all along seen you was a world too good for—in fact, quite above your situation in my poor shop! I may have been wrong, Mr. Titmouse," he continued diffidently—"but I did it for the best—eh?—don't you understand me, Mr. Titmouse?" Titmouse continued looking on the floor incredulously, sheepishly, and somewhat sullenly.

"Very much obliged, sir—but must say you've rather a funny way of showing it, sir. Look at the sort of life you've led me for this——"

"Ah! knew you'd say so! But I can lay my hand on my heart, Mr. Titmouse, and declare to God—I can, indeed, Mr. Titmouse——" Titmouse preserved a very embarrassing silence—"*See* I'm out of your good books—But—won't you forget and forgive, Mr. Titmouse? I *meant* well. Nay, I humbly beg forgiveness for everything you've not liked in

me. Can I say more? Come, Mr. Titmouse, you've a noble nature, and I ask forgiveness!"

"You—you ought to do it before the whole shop, if you're in earnest," replied Titmouse, a little relenting—"for they've all seen your goings on."

"Them!—the brutes!—the vulgar fellows, eugh!—you and I, Mr. Titmouse, are a *leetle* above them! D'ye think we ought to mind what *servants* say?

"Ah! I don't know—you've used me most uncommon bad, 'pon my soul!—you've nearly broke my heart, sir! You have!"

"Well, my womankind at home are right, after all! They told me all along I was going the wrong way to work, when I said how I tried to keep your pride down, and prevent you from having your head turned by knowing your good looks! Over and over again, my little girl has said, with tears in her dear eyes, 'You'll break his spirit, dear papa—if he *is* handsome, wasn't it God that made him so?'" The little frost-work which Titmouse had thrown around his heart, began to melt like snow under sunbeams. "Ah, Mr. Titmouse, Mr. Titmouse! the women are always right, and *we're* always wrong," continued Tag-rag earnestly, perceiving his advantage. "Upon my soul, I could kick myself for my stupidity!"

"Ah, I should think so! No one knows what I have suffered! And now that I'm—I suppose you've heard it all, sir?—what's in the wind—and all that?"

"Yes, sir—Mr. Gammon and I have had a long talk yesterday about you, in which he did certainly tell me everything. O Lord! the news is really delightful! delightful!"

"*Isn't* it, sir?" eagerly interrupted Titmouse.

"Ah! ten thous—I *must* shake hands with you, my dear Mr. Titmouse; Thomas Tag-rag may be a plain-spoken and wrong-headed man, Mr. Titmouse—but he has a warm heart, I assure you!"

"And did Mr. Gammon tell you *all*, sir?" eagerly interrupted Titmouse.

"Everything—everything; quite confidential, I assure you, for he saw the interest I felt in you!"

"And did he say about my—hem!—eh? my stopping a few weeks longer with you?" inquired Titmouse, chagrin overspreading his features.

"I think he did, indeed, Mr. Titmouse! He's quite bent on it, sir!"

"'Pon my soul, you speak most uncommon gentleman-like, sir, certainly!" said Titmouse, with a little excitement—

"Thomas Tagrag may be a plain-spoken and wrong-headed man — but he has a warm heart!"

"and if you'd only *always*—but that's all past and gone; and I've no objections to say at once, that all the articles I may want in your line I'll have at your establishment, pay cash down, and ask for no discount.'"

"You won't forget your oldest, your truest, your humblest friend, Mr. Titmouse," said Tag-rag, with a cringing air.

"Hem!—Now, *are* you such a friend, Mr. Tag-rag?" cried he sheepishly.

"Am I?—Can you doubt me? Try me!"

"Well—if you've a mind to prove your words, Mr. Tag-rag, and don't mind advancing me a ten-pound note——"

"Why—*was* ever anything so unfortunate?" stammered Tag-rag. "That cursed lot of French goods I bought only yesterday to be paid for this very morning—and it will drain me of every penny!"

"Ah—yes!—True! Well, it don't much signify," said Titmouse carelessly, running his hand through his bushy hair. "In fact, I needn't have bothered an old friend at all, now I think of it—Mr. Gammon says he's my banker to any amount. I beg pardon, I'm sure——"

Tag-rag was in a horrid dilemma. He felt so flustered by the suddenness and seriousness of the thing, that he could not see his way plain in any direction.

"Let me see," at length he stammered; and pulling a ready-reckoner out of his pocket, he affected to be consulting it, as if to ascertain merely the state of his banker's account, but really desiring a few moments' time to collect his thoughts. 'Twas in vain, however; he saw no way of escape; he must, he feared, cash up! "Well," said he—"it certainly *is* rather unfortunate, just at this precise moment; but I'll step to the shop, and see how my ready-money matters stand. It sha'n't be a trifle, Mr. Titmouse, that shall stand between us. But—if I *should* be hard run—perhaps—eh? Would a five-pound note do?"

"Why—a—a—certainly, if it wouldn't suit you to advance the ten——"

"I dare say," interrupted Tag-rag, a trifle relieved, "I shall be able to accommodate you. Perhaps you'll step on to the shop presently, and then we can talk over matters! —By the way—did you ever see anything so odd?—forgot the main thing; come and take your mutton with me at Clapham, next Sunday—my womankind will be quite delighted. Nay, 'tis *their* invitation—ha, ha!"

"You're uncommon polite," replied Titmouse, coloring

with pleasure. Here seemed the first pale primrose of the coming spring—an invitation to Satin Lodge!

"The politeness—the favor—will be yours, Mr. Titmouse! I'm quite proud of your coming! We shall be quite alone; have you all to ourselves; only me, my wife, and daughter—an only child, Mr. Titmouse—*such* a child! She's really often said to me, 'I wonder'—but,—I won't make you vain, eh! May I call it a fixture?"

"'Pon my life, Mr. Tag-rag, you're monstrous uncommon polite. It's true, I was going to dine with Mr. Gammon——"

"Oh! pho! he's only a bachelor—*I've* got ladies in the case, and all that—eh, Mr. Titmouse? and a *young* one!"

"Well, thank you, sir. Since you're so pressing——"

"That's it! An engagement poz!—Satin Lodge—for Sunday next," said Tag-rag, rising and looking at his watch. "Time for me to be off. See you soon at the shop? Soon arrange that little matter of business, eh? You understand? Good-by! good-by!" and shaking Titmouse cordially by the hand, Tag-rag took his departure.

By the time that Titmouse had made his appearance at the shop, Tag-rag had determined on the course he should pursue in the very embarrassing matter above referred to. To the amazement of all present, he bolted out of a little counting-house, hastened to meet Titmouse with outstretched hand and cordial speech, drew him into his little room, and shut the door. There Tag-rag informed his flurried young friend that he had made arrangements (with a little inconvenience, which between friends signified nothing) for lending Titmouse five pounds.

"And, as life's uncertain, my dear Mr. Titmouse," said Tag-rag, as Titmouse, with ill-disguised ecstasy, put the five-pound note into his pocket—"even between the dearest friends—eh? Understand? It's not *you* I *fear*, nor you me, because we've confidence in each other. But if anything should happen, those we leave behind us"—Here he took out of his desk, an "I. O. U. £5," ready drawn up and dated—"a mere slip—a word or two—is satisfaction to both of us."

"Oh, yes, sir! yes, sir!—anything!" said Titmouse; and hastily taking the pen proffered him, signed his name; on which Tag-rag felt a little relieved. The head shopman was summoned into the room, and thus addressed by his imperi-

ous employer: "Mr. Lutestring, you will have the goodness to see that Mr. Titmouse is treated by every person in my establishment with the utmost possible respect. Whoever treats this gentleman with the slightest disrespect isn't any longer a servant of mine. D'ye hear me, Mr. Lutestring?" added Tag-rag sternly, observing a very significant glance of intense hatred which Lutestring directed toward Titmouse. "D'ye hear me, sir?"

"Oh, yes, sir! yes, sir! your orders shall be attended to," he replied in as insolent a tone as he could venture upon, and leaving the room he had within five minutes filled the mind of every shopman in the establishment with feelings of mingled wonder, hatred, and fear towards Titmouse. What could have happened? What was Mr. Tag-rag about? "D—n Titmouse!" said or thought every one of them!

The next day Mr. Gammon called and contrived to get Titmouse's signature to sundry papers of no little consequence; amongst others, first, to a bond conditioned for the payment of £500; second, another for £10,000; and last, an agreement (of which he gave Titmouse an alleged copy) by which Titmouse, in consideration of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap using their best exertions to put him in possession of the estate, etc., etc., bound himself to conform to their wishes in everything, on pain of their instantly throwing up the whole affair, looking out for another heir-at-law (?) and issuing execution forthwith against Titmouse for all expenses incurred under his retainer. When Gammon had got to this point, he thought it the fitting opportunity for producing a second five-pound note. He did so, and put Titmouse thereby into an ecstasy. Gammon easily obtained from him an account of his little money transactions with Huckaback—of which, however, all he could tell was—that for ten shillings down, he had given a written engagement to pay fifty pounds on getting the estate. Of this Gammon made a careful memorandum, explaining the atrocious villainy of Huckaback—and, in short, that if he (Titmouse) did not look very sharply about him, he would be robbed right and left.

"But, by the way, talking of money," said Titmouse suddenly, "you can't think how surprising handsome Mr. Tag-rag has behaved to me!"

"Indeed, my dear sir! what has he done?"

"Advanced me five pounds—all of his own head!"

Throwing as much smiling indifference into his manner as was possible, Gammon asked Titmouse the particulars of so strange a transaction. Titmouse answered that Mr. Tag-rag had, in the very handsomest way, volunteered the loan of five pounds; and moreover offered him any further sum he might require!

"What a charming change, Mr. Titmouse!" exclaimed Gammon, with a watchful eye and anxious smile.

"Most delightful, 'pon my soul!"

"Rather sudden, too!—eh?—Mr. Titmouse?"

"Why—no—no; I should say, 'pon my life, certainly not. The fact is, we've long misunderstood each other. He's had an uncommon good opinion of me all the while—people *have* tried to set him against me; but it's no use; he's found them out—he told me so! And he's not only said, but *done* the handsome thing! He's turned up, by Jove, a trump all of a sudden—though it long looked an ugly card."

"Ha, ha, ha!—very!—how curious!"

"I'm going, too, to dine at Satin Lodge, Mr. Tag-rag's country house, next Sunday."

"Indeed! It will be quite a change for you, Mr. Titmouse!'

"Yes, it will, by Jove; and—a—a—what's more—there's—hem!—you understand?"

"Go on, I beg, my dear Mr. Titmouse——"

"There's a lady in the case—not that she's *said* anything; but a nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse—eh? Mr. Gammon?"

"I should think so—Miss Tag-rag will have money, of course?"

"You've hit it! Lots! But I've not made up my mind."

"Of course, Mr. Tag-rag took no security for his loan, between such close friends as you and him?"

"Oh—why—now you mention it—But 'twas only a line—one line."

"I knew it, my dear sir," interrupted Gammon calmly, "Tag-rag and Huckaback, they're on a par—ah, ha, ha!"

"What keen eyes you lawyers have, to be sure! Well—I never"—he was evidently somewhat staggered. "I—I—must say," he presently added, looking gratefully at Gammon,

"I think I *do* now know of a true friend, that sent me two five-pound notes, and never asked for any security."

"My dear sir, you really pain me by alluding to such a matter!"

[Oh, Gammon, is not this too bad! What are the papers which you know are now in your pocket, signed only this very evening by Titmouse?]

"You are not a match for Tag-rag, Titmouse; because he was *made* for a tradesman—you are not. Do you think he would have parted with his £5 but for value received?"

"I—I really begin to think, Mr. Gammon—'pon my soul, I do think you're right."

"Think!—Why—for a man of your acuteness—how could he imagine you could forget the long course of insult and tyranny which you have endured under him; that he should change all of a sudden—just now, when——"

"Ay, by Jove! just when I'm coming into my property," interrupted Titmouse quickly.

"To be sure—to be sure! Just now, I say, to make this sudden change! Bah! bah!"

"I hate Tag-rag, always did. Now, he's trying to take me in, just as he does everybody; but I've found him out I won't lay out a penny with him!"

"Would you, do you think, ever have seen the inside of Satin Lodge, if you hadn't——"

"Why, I don't know; I really think—hem!"

"*Would* you, my dear sir?—But now a scheme occurs to me. Shall I tell you a way of proving how insincere and interested he is toward you? Go to dinner, by all means, eat his good things, hear all that the whole set of them have to say, and just before you go, pretend, with a long face, that our affair is all a bottle of smoke; say that we have told you the day before that we have made a horrid mistake, and you were the wrong man——"

"'Pon my life, I—I—really, daren't—I couldn't keep it up—he'd half kill me. Besides, there will be Miss Tag-rag—it would be the death of her, I know."

"Miss Tag-rag! Gracious Heavens! What on earth can you have to do with *her*? *You*—why, if you really succeed in getting this fine property, she might make a very suitable wife for one of your grooms!"

"Ah! I don't know—she may be a devilish fine girl, and the old fellow will have a tolerable penny to leave her—and a bird in the hand—eh? Besides, I know what she's all along thought—hem!—but that doesn't signify."

"Pho! pho! Ridiculous! Fancy Miss Tag-rag Mrs. Titmouse! Your eldest son—ah, ha, ha! Tag-rag Titmouse, Esq. Delightful! Your honored father a draper in Oxford Street!" Gammon succeeded, at length, in obtaining Titmouse's promise to adopt his suggestion, and thereby discover the true nature of the feelings entertained towards him at Satin Lodge. He shook Titmouse energetically by the hand, and left him perfectly certain that if there was one person in the world worthy of his esteem, and even reverence, that person was OILY GAMMON, ESQ.

On reaching the office, he delivered to Mr. Quirk the documents to which he had obtained Titmouse's signature.

"Now, Gammon," said the old gentleman, "I think we may be up and at 'em."

"Perhaps so, Mr. Quirk," replied Gammon; "but we must, for no earthly consideration, be premature in our operations! Let me, by the way, tell you one or two little matters that have just occurred to Titmouse!" When he mentioned the name of Miss Tag-rag, and his grave suspicions concerning her, Quirk bounced up out of his chair, almost startling Gammon out of *his*. If he had just been told that his banker had broke, he could scarce have shown more emotion.

The fact was, that he, too, had a DAUGHTER—an only child—whom he had destined to become Mrs. Titmouse.

"A designing old villain!" he exclaimed at length, and Gammon agreed with him, but, strange to say, with all his acuteness, never adverted to the real cause of Quirk's sudden and vehement exclamation.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH THE HERO MAKES HIS ENTRANCE INTO—AND HIS EXIT FROM—THE SOCIETY OF MISS TABITHA TAG-RAG AT SATIN LODGE

MEANWHILE, Mr. Titmouse was not neglected on Sunday. First came Mr. Snap, who, having quite as keen and clear an eye for his own interest as his senior partners, had early seen how capable was acquaintance with Titmouse of being turned to his (Snap's) great advantage. He had come to do a little bit of toadying on his own account; when he was interrupted by a double knock, and—oh, mercy on us!—enter Mr. Gammon! Whether he or Snap felt more disconcerted, I cannot say; but Snap *looked* the most confused and sneaking. Each told the other a lie, in as easy, good-natured a way as he could assume, concerning the object of his visit to Titmouse. Thus they were going on, when—another knock—and, "Is this Mr. Titmouse's?" inquired a voice, which brought a little color into the face of both Gammon and Snap; for it was absolutely old Quirk, who bustled breathless into the room, on his first visit, and seemed completely confounded by the sight of both his partners. Each of the three partners felt (in his own way) exquisite embarrassment. Huckaback, some time afterward, made his appearance, but *him* Titmouse unceremoniously dismissed in a twinkling, in spite of a vehement remonstrance.

But presently, behold another arrival—Mr. Tag-rag, who had come to announce that his carriage was waiting to convey Mr. Titmouse to Satin Lodge, and take him a long drive in the country! Each of these four worthies could have spit in the other's face: first, for *detecting*, and, secondly, for *rivaling* him in his schemes upon Titmouse. A few minutes after the arrival of Tag-rag, Gammon, half-choked with disgust, and despising himself even more than his fellow-visitors, slunk off, followed almost immediately by Quirk,

who was dying to consult him on this new aspect of affairs which had presented itself. Snap very shortly followed in the footsteps of his partners, having made no engagement whatever with Titmouse; and thus the enterprising and determined Tag-rag was left master of the field. He had in fact come to *do business*, and business he determined to do. Tho Tag-rag out-stayed all his fellow-visitors, in the manner which has been described, he could not prevail upon Titmouse to accompany him in his "carriage," for Titmouse pleaded a pressing engagement, but pledged himself to make his appearance at Satin Lodge at the appointed hour. Away, therefore, drove Tag-rag, indignant at the cringing, sycophantic attentions of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, against whom he resolved to put Titmouse on his guard.

My friend Tittlebat made his appearance at the gate of Satin Lodge, at about a quarter to four o'clock.

Miss Tag-rag had been before her glass since her return from chapel. An hour and a half had she bestowed on her hair, disposing it in little corkscrew and somewhat scanty curls, that quite glistened in bear's grease, hanging on each side of a pair of lean and sallow cheeks. The color which ought to have distributed itself over her cheeks, in roseate delicacy, thought fit to collect itself into the tip of her sharp little nose. Her small gray eyes beamed with the gentle and attractive expression that was perceptible in her father's, and her projecting under lip reminded everybody of that delicate feature in her mother. She was very short, and her figure rather skinny and angular. She wore her lilac-colored frock; her waist being pinched into a degree that made you think of a fit of the colic when you looked at her. A long red sash, tied in a most elaborate bow, gave a very brilliant air to her dress generally. She had a thin gold chain round her neck, and wore long white gloves; her left hand holding her pocket-handkerchief, which she had suffused with bergamot that scented the whole room. Mrs. Tag-rag had made herself very splendid, in a red silk gown and staring head-dress; in fact, she seemed *on fire*. As for Mr. Tag-rag, whenever he was dressed in his Sunday clothes, he looked the model of a parson in his black coat, waistcoat, and trousers, and primly-tied white neckerchief, with

no shirt-collar visible. At length Miss Tag-rag's little heart fluttered violently, for her papa told her that Titmouse was coming up the road—and so he was. Not dreaming that he could be seen, he stood beside the gate for a moment, and, taking a dirty-looking silk handkerchief out of his hat, slapped it vigorously about his boots, and replaced it in his hat. Then he unbuttoned his surtout, adjusted it nicely, and disposed his chain and eyeglass just so as to let the tip only of the latter be seen peeping out of his waistcoat; twitched up his collars, plucked down his wrist-bands, drew the tip of a white pocket-handkerchief out of the pocket in the breast of his surtout, pulled a white glove half-way on his left hand; and,—Tittlebat Titmouse, Esq., the great guest of the day, for the first time in his life entered the domain of Mr. Tag-rag.

As Titmouse approached the house, he saw the two ladies standing at the windows. Off went his hat, and out dropped the silk handkerchief, not a little disconcerting him for the moment. Tag-rag, however, soon occupied his attention at the door with anxious civilities, shaking him by the hand, hanging up his hat and stick, and then introducing him to the sitting-room. The ladies received him with the most profound curtsies, which Titmouse returned with a quick embarrassed bow, and an indistinct—"I hope you're well, mem?"

The only person tolerably at his ease, and he *only* tolerably, was Mr. Tag-rag; and he asked his guest——

"Wash your hands, Titmouse, before dinner?" Titmouse said he had washed them before he had come out. In a few minutes, however, he felt a little more assured; for it was impossible for him not to perceive the awful deference with which he was treated.

"Seen the *Sunday Flash*, mem?" said he modestly, addressing Mrs. Tag-rag.

"I—I—that is—not *to-day*," she replied, coloring.

"Vastly amusing, isn't it?" interposed Tag-rag.

"Ye—e—s," replied Titmouse, "an uncommon good fight between——"

Tag-rag saw his wife getting redder and redder. "No news stirring about Ministers, is there?" said he, with a desperate attempt at a diversion.

"Not that I have heard," replied Titmouse. Soon he got a little further, and said how cheerful the stages going past must make the house. Tag-rag agreed with him. Then there was a little pause.

"Been to church, mem, this morning, mem?" timidly inquired Titmouse of Miss Tag-rag.

"Yes, sir," she replied, faintly coloring, casting her eyes to the ground, and suddenly putting her hand into that of her mother—with such an innocent, engaging simplicity—like a timid fawn lying as close as possible to its dam!

"We always go to *chapel*, sir," said Mrs. Tag-rag confidently, in spite of a very fierce look from her husband; "the gospel isn't preached in the Church of England. We sit under Mr. Horror—a heavenly preacher! You've heard of Mr. Horror?"

"Yes, mem! Oh, yes! Capital preacher!" replied Titmouse, who had never in his life heard of Mr. Horror.

"When *will* dinner be ready, Mrs. T.?" inquired Tag-rag abruptly, and with a very perceptible dash of sternness in his tone; but dinner was announced the very next moment.

Titmouse's proffered arm the timid Miss Tag-rag scarcely touched with the tip of her finger, as she walked beside him to dinner. Titmouse soon got tolerably composed and cheerful at dinner, and, to oblige his hospitable host and hostess, ate till he was fit to burst. Miss Tag-rag, tho really very hungry, ate only a very small slice of beef and a quarter of a custard, and drank a third of a glass of sherry after dinner. She never once spoke, except in hurried answers to her papa and mamma; and, sitting exactly opposite Titmouse (with only a plate of greens and a boiled fowl between them), was continually coloring whenever their eyes happened to encounter one another, on which occasion hers would suddenly drop, as if overpowered by the brilliance of his. Titmouse began to love her very fast. After the ladies had withdrawn, you should have heard the way that Tag-rag went on with Titmouse.

Titmouse, however, swallowed with equal facility Mr. Tag-rag's hard port and his soft blarney. When at length Tag-rag alluded to the painfully evident embarrassment of his "poor Tabby," and said he had "now found out what had been so long the matter with her," (ay, even this went

down,) and hemmed, and winked his eye, and drained his glass, Titmouse began to get flustered, blushed, and hoped Mr. Tag-rag would soon "join the ladies."

After the tea-things had been removed, Tag-rag, directing Titmouse's attention to the piano, asked him whether he liked music. Titmouse, with great eagerness, hoped Miss T. would give them some music; and she, after a long and vigorous siege, at length asked her papa what it should be.

"*The Battle of Prague*," said her papa.

"*Before Jehovah's Awful Throne*," hastily interposed her mamma.

"The Battle," sternly repeated her papa.

"It's Sunday night, Mr. T.," meekly rejoined his wife.

"Which will *you* have, Mr. Titmouse?" inquired Tag-rag, with *The Battle of Prague* written in every feature of his face. Titmouse almost burst into a state of perspiration.

"A little of both, sir, if you please."

"Well," replied Tag-rag, slightly relaxing, "that will do. Split the difference—eh? Come, Tab, down with you. Titmouse, will you turn over the music for her?"

Titmouse rose, and having sheepishly taken his station beside Miss Tag-rag, the performance commenced with *Before Jehovah's Awful Throne!* But, mercy upon us! at what a rate she rattled over that "pious air." The heart of the lovely performer was in *The Battle of Prague*, to which she presently did most ample justice. Titmouse vowed that he had never heard such splendid music—begged for more; and away went Miss Tag-rag, hurried along by her excitement. Rondo after rondo, march after march, for at least half an hour; at the end of which old Tag-rag suddenly kissed her with passionate fondness. Tho Mrs. Tag-rag was horrified at the impiety of all this, she kept a very anxious eye on the young couple, and interchanged with her husband, every now and then, very significant looks. Shortly after nine, spirits, wine, and hot and cold water were brought in. As Titmouse advanced with his gin and water, his spirits got higher and higher, and his tongue more fluent. He once or twice dropped the "Mr." when addressing Tag-rag; several times smiled, and once even winked at the embarrassed Miss Tag-rag. Mr. Tag-rag saw it and could not control himself.

"Tab! ah, Tab! what *has* been the matter with you all these months?"—and he winked his eye at her and then at Titmouse.

"Pàpa!" exclaimed Miss Tag-rag, blushing up to her very temples.

"Ah, Titmouse—Titmouse—give me your hand," said Tag-rag; "you'll forget us all when you're a great man—but we shall always remember you."

"You're very good—very!" said Titmouse, cordially returning the pressure of Tag-rag's hand.—At that instant it suddenly occurred to him to adopt the suggestion of Mr. Gammon. Tag-rag was going on very fast, indeed, about the disinterested nature of his feelings toward Titmouse; toward whom, he said, he had always felt just as he did at that moment—'twas in vain to deny it.

"I am sure your conduct shows it, sir," commenced Titmouse. "I could have taken my oath, sir, you would have refused to let me come into your house, when you heard of it——"

"Ah, ha!—that's *rather* an odd idea, too. If I felt a true friendship for you as plain Titmouse, it's so likely *I* should have *cut* you just when—ahem! My dear sir! it was I that thought *you* wouldn't have come into *my* house! A likely thing!"

"Well—I'm a happy man again," resumed Titmouse, resolved now to go on with his adventure. "And when did they tell you of it, sir?"

"Oh, a few days ago—a week ago," replied Tag-rag, trying to recollect.

"Why—why—sir—a'n't you mistaken? It only happened this morning, after you left——"

"Eh? eh? ah, ha! What *do* you mean, Mr. Titmouse?" interrupted Mr. Tag-rag, with a faint attempt at a smile. Mrs. Tag-rag and Miss Tag-rag also turned exceedingly startled faces toward Titmouse, who felt as if a house were going to fall down on him.

"Why, sir," he began to cry, (an attempt which was greatly aided by the maudlin condition to which drink had reduced him,) "till to-day I thought I was heir to ten thousand a year, and it seems I'm not; it's all a mistake of those cursed people at Saffron Hill!"

"— Till today, I thought I was heir
to ten thousand a year"

Tag-rag's face changed visibly, and showed the desperate shock he had just sustained. His inward agony was forcing out on his slanting forehead great drops of perspiration.

"What a capital joke, Mr. Titmouse, ah, ha!" he gasped, hastily passing his handkerchief over his forehead. Titmouse, though greatly alarmed, stood to his gun pretty steadily.

"I—I wish it was a joke! It's been no joke to *me*, sir. There's another Tittlebat Titmouse, it seems, in Shoreditch, that's the right——"

"Who told you this, sir? Pho, I don't—I can't believe it," said Tag-rag, in a voice tremulous between suppressed rage and fear.

"True, tho, 'pon my life! It *is*, so help me——"

"How dare you swear before ladies, sir? You're insulting them, sir!" cried Tag-rag, trembling with rage. "And in my presence, sir? You're not a gentleman!" He suddenly dropped his voice, and, in a trembling and most earnest manner, asked Titmouse whether he was really joking or serious.

"Never more serious in my life, sir; and enough to make me so, sir!" replied Titmouse in a lamentable manner.

"You mean to tell me it's all a mistake, then, and you're no more than you always were?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Yes!" cried Titmouse mournfully; "and if you'll only be so kind as to let me serve you as I used. You know it was no fault of *mine*, sir. They *would* tell me it was so!"

"Oh, ma, I do feel *so* ill!" faintly exclaimed Miss Tag-rag, turning deadly pale. Titmouse was on the verge of dropping on his knees and confessing the trick, greatly agitated at the effect produced on Miss Tag-rag; when Tag-rag's heavy hand was suddenly placed on his shoulder, and he whispered in a fierce undertone, "You're an impostor, sir!" which arrested Titmouse, and made something like a MAN of him. He was a fearful fool, but he did not want for mere *pluck;* and now it was roused. Mrs. Tag-rag exclaimed, "Oh, you shocking scamp!" as she passed Titmouse, and led her daughter out of the room.

"Then an impostor, sir, a'n't fit company for *you*, of course, sir!" said Titmouse, rising, and trembling with mingled apprehension and anger.

"Pay me my five-pound note!" almost shouted Tag-rag, furiously tightening the grasp by which he held Titmouse's collar.

"Well, sir, and I will, if you'll only take your hand off! Hollo, sir—What the de—leave go, sir! Hands off! Are you going to murder me? I'll pay you and done with you, sir," stammered Titmouse, when a faint scream was heard, plainly from Miss Tag-rag, overhead, and in hysterics. Then the seething caldron boiled over.

"You *infernal* scoundrel!" said Tag-rag, almost choked with fury; and suddenly seizing Titmouse by the collar, scarce giving him time, in passing, to get hold of his hat and stick, he urged him along through the passage, down the gravel walk, threw open the gate, thrust him furiously through it, and sent after him such a blast of execration as was enough to drive him a hundred yards down the road. Titmouse did not fully recover his breath or his senses for a long while afterward. When he did, the first thing he felt was an inclination to fall down on his knees on the open road, and worship the sagacious and admirable GAMMON, who had so exactly predicted what had come to pass!

CHAPTER X

WHEREIN MALIGN FATE PREPARES A FEARFUL BLOW FOR THE NOBLE AND UNSUSPECTING AUBREYS OF YATTON

THE Aubreys are a younger branch of the ancient and noble family of the Dreddlingtons. Their residence, YATTON, is in the north-eastern part of the country, not above fifteen or twenty miles from the sea. The hall is one of those old structures, the sight of which throws you back at least a couple of centuries in our English history. It stands in a park, crowded with trees, many of them of great age and size. The house itself is a large irregular pile of dull red brickwork, with great stacks of chimneys in the rear; the body of the building has evidently been erected at different times. Altogether it is truly a fine old mansion.

Mr. Aubrey, the head of the family, is in his thirty-fourth year. He has a reserve that is not cynical, but only diffident; yet it gives him, at least at first sight, and till you have become familiar with his features, which are of a cast at once refined and aristocratic, yet full of goodness, an air of hauteur, which is very—very far from his real nature. He is a man of superior intellect, and is a capital scholar. He has made several really valuable contributions to historic literature. He has entered upon *politics* with uncommon ardor, for he is a man of very clear head, ready in debate, and, moreover, has a very impressive delivery as a public speaker. He is generous and charitable, and careless, even to a fault, of his pecuniary interests. He is a man of perfect simplicity and purity of character. In manner Mr. Aubrey is calm and gentlemanlike; in person he is rather above the middle height and of slight make. His countenance has a serene manliness about it when in repose, and great acuteness and vivacity when animated. His hair, not very full, is black as jet, and his forehead ample and marked. Mr. Aubrey has been married about six years; and Agnes, his wife, has borne him but two children—a boy and a girl.

Miss Catherine Aubrey is an exquisite specimen of budding womanhood. I feel I shall get extravagant if I begin to dwell upon her charms, but I shall tell you that her personal beauty is but a faint emblem of the beauties of her mind and character. She is Aubrey's only sister; and he cherishes her with the tenderest and fondest regard. She is calculated equally for the seclusion of Yatton and the splendid atmosphere of Almack's; but Kate is a girl of decided character, of strong sense, of high principle; all of which are irradiated, not overborne, by her sparkling vivacity of temperament. She has real talent; and her mind has been trained, and her tastes directed with affectionate skill and vigilance by her gifted brother. She has many accomplishments; but the only one I shall choose here to name is—music.

Altho he belongs not to the Aubrey family by ties of blood, yet in affection and long service he may claim relationship and consequently merits description here. I refer to the good, the excellent Dr. Tatham. He had been Vicar of Yatton for nearly thirty years. He was a delightful specimen of a country parson. Cheerful, unaffected, and good-natured, there was a dash of quaintness or roughness about his manners, that reminded you of the crust in very fine old port. He had been a widower, and childless, for fifteen years. His parish had been ever since his family, whom he still watched over with an affectionate vigilance. He was respected and beloved by all. Almost every man, woman, and child that had died in Yatton, during nearly thirty years, had departed with the sound of his kind and solemn voice in his ears. He claimed a sort of personal acquaintance with almost all the gravestones in his little churchyard; and when he looked at them, his conscience bore him witness that he had done his duty by the dust that slept underneath. Methinks I see him now, bustling about the village, with healthy, ruddy cheek, a clear, cheerful eye, hair white as snow; a small stout figure, clothed in a suit of somewhat rusty black, (knee-breeches and gaiters all round the year,) and with a small shovel-hat. Dr. Tatham has known Mr. Aubrey ever since he was about five years old. 'Twas the doctor that first taught him Greek and Latin; and, up to his going to college, gave him the frequent advantage of his learned experience.

A few days after the opening of the New Year, about eight o'clock in the evening, Mr. Aubrey and Kate were sitting together playing at chess, Dr. Tatham and Mrs. Aubrey looking on with much interest, when a servant made his appearance, and told Mr. Aubrey, that Mr. Parkinson of Grilston, Mr. Aubrey's solicitor, and another gentleman had called, and were waiting in the library to speak to him on business.

"I wonder what can possibly have brought them here," he said. "Oh, I see, 'tis probably about Miss Evelyn's marriage-settlement—I'm to be one of her trustees." With this he left the room, and presently entered the library, where were two gentlemen, one of whom was in the act of pulling off his great coat. This was a stranger, a tall, thin, elderly man, with short gray hair—his countenance bespeaking the calm, acute, clear-headed man of business. He was introduced by the other gentleman, Mr. Parkinson, a plain, substantial-looking, hard-headed country attorney.

"Mr. Runnington, my London agent, sir."

Mr. Aubrey bowed.

"Pray, gentlemen, be seated. Mr. Parkinson, you look very serious—both of you. What is the matter?"

"Mr. Runnington, sir, has arrived, most unexpectedly to me," replied Mr. Parkinson, "only an hour or two ago, from London, on business of the last importance to you."

"*To me!*—Well, what is it? Pray, say at once what it is—I am all attention," said Mr. Aubrey anxiously.

"Do you happen," commenced Mr. Parkinson very nervously, "to remember sending Waters to me on Monday or Tuesday last, with a paper, a declaration of ejectment, which had been served by some one on old Jolter, one of your tenants?"

"Certainly," replied Mr. Aubrey, after a moment's consideration.

"Mr. Runnington's errand is connected with that document," said Mr. Parkinson, and paused.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Aubrey, apparently a little relieved. "You will oblige me by being explicit."

"This paper," said Mr. Runnington, "is served virtually on you, and you are the real defendant."

"So I apprehend."

"Do you recollect, Mr. Aubrey," said Mr. Parkinson, with

a trepidation which he could not conceal, "several years ago, some serious conversation which you and I had together on the state of your title—when I was preparing your marriage-settlements?"

Mr. Aubrey started, and his face was suddenly blanched.

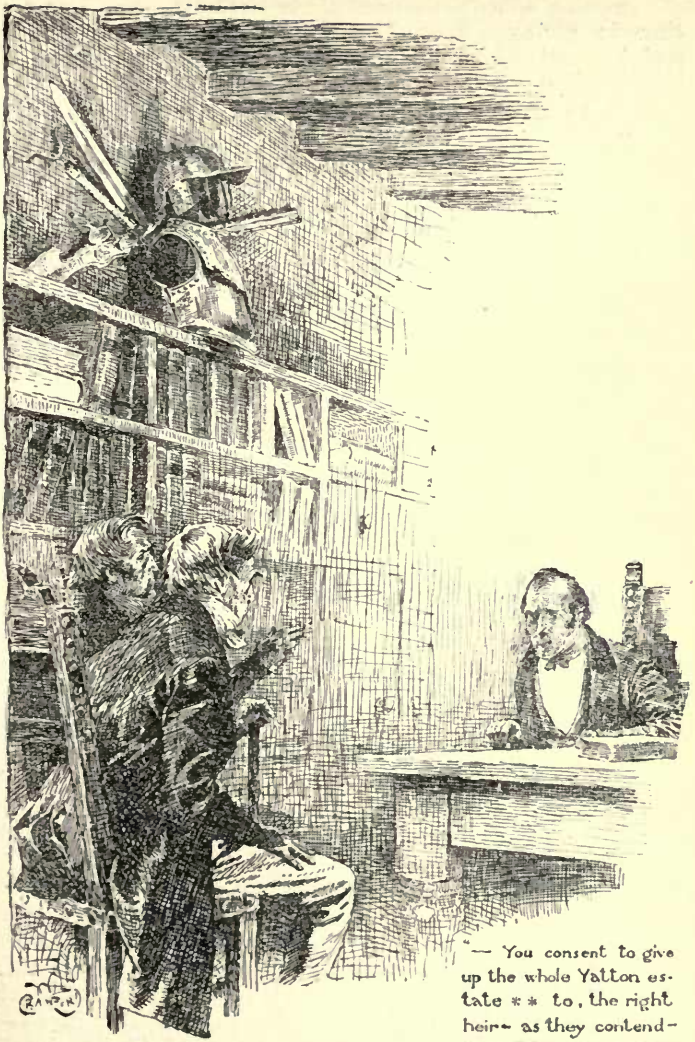
"The matters we then discussed have suddenly acquired fearful importance. This paper occasions us the profoundest anxiety." Mr. Aubrey continued silent, gazing on Mr. Parkinson with intensity. "Supposing, from a hasty glance at it, and from the message accompanying it, that it was merely another action about the slip of waste land attached to Jolter's cottage, I sent it up to London to my agents, Messrs. Runnington, requesting them to call on the plaintiff's attorney, and settle the action. He did so; and—perhaps, you will explain the rest," said Mr. Parkinson to Mr. Runnington.

"Certainly," said that gentleman with a serious air, but much more calmly and firmly than Mr. Parkinson; "I called accordingly, early yesterday morning, on Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, a very well—but not enviably—known firm in the profession; and in a very few minutes my conception of the nature of the business I had called to settle was set right. In short——" he paused, as if distressed at the intelligence he was about to communicate.

"Oh, pray, pray go on, sir," said Mr. Aubrey in a low tone.

"I am no stranger, sir, to your firmness of character; but I shall have to tax it, I fear, to its uttermost. To come at once to the point—they told me that I might undoubtedly *settle* the matter, if you would consent to give up immediate possession of *the whole Yatton estate*, and account for the mesne profits to their client, the right heir—as they contend —a Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse." Mr. Aubrey leaned back in his chair, overcome, for an instant, by this astounding intelligence; and all three of them preserved silence of more than a minute.

"I felt it my duty to lose not an instant in coming down to Yatton," resumed Mr. Runnington, observing Mr. Aubrey's eye again directed inquiringly toward him; "for Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap are very dangerous people to deal with, and must be encountered promptly, and with the great-



"— You consent to give up the whole Yatton estate * * to, the right heir~ as they contend— a Mr. Tittlebat Titmouse"

est possible caution. Under these circumstances, I lost no time in giving a special retainer to the Attorney-General, and in retaining as junior a gentleman whom I consider to be the ablest and most experienced lawyer on the circuit."

"Did they say anything concerning the nature of their client's title?" inquired Mr. Aubrey.

"Very little—I might say, nothing. If they had been *never* so precise, of course I should have distrusted every word they said. They certainly mentioned that they had had the first conveyancing opinions in the kingdom, which concurred in favor of their client; that they had been for months prepared at all points, and accident only had delayed their commencing proceedings till now."

"Did you make any inquiries as to who the claimant was?" inquired Mr. Aubrey.

"Yes; but all I could learn was, that they had discovered him by mere accident; and that he was at present in very obscure and distressed circumstances."

"What is the meaning of their affecting to seek the recovery of only one insignificant portion of the property?" he inquired.

"It is their own choice. The title, however, by which they may succeed in recovering what they at present go for, will avail to recover every acre of the estate, and the present action will consequently decide everything!"

"And suppose the worst—that they are successful," said Mr. Aubrey, "what is to be said about the rental which I have been receiving all this time—ten thousand a year?"

"Oh! that's quite an after-consideration—let us fight the battle."

"I beg, Mr. Runnington, that you will withhold nothing from me," said Mr. Aubrey. "To what extent shall I be liable?"

Mr. Runnington paused.

"I am afraid that *all* the mesne profits, as they are called, which you have received——" commenced Mr. Parkinson.

"No, no," interrupted Mr. Runnington; "I have been turning that matter over in my mind, and I think that the statute of limitations will bar all but the last six years——"

"Why, *that* will be sixty thousand pounds!" interrupted Mr. Aubrey, with a look of sudden despair. "Gracious

Heavens, that is perfectly frightful!—frightful! If I lose Yatton, I shall not have a place to put my head in—not one farthing to support myself with! And yet to have to make up *sixty thousand pounds!*" An involuntary shudder ran through Mr. Aubrey. "Sixty thousand pounds!" he exclaimed, rising and walking to and fro. "Why, I am ruined beyond all redemption! How can I ever satisfy it?"

"We must remember," said Mr. Runnington, "that '*possession is nine-tenths of the law*'; which means, that your mere possession will entitle you to retain it against all the world, till a stronger title than yours to the right of possession be made out. You stand on a mountain; and it is for your adversary to displace you, not by showing merely that you have no real title, but that *he has*. If he could prove all your title-deeds to be merely waste paper—that in fact you have no more title than I have—he would not by stopping there advance his own case an inch; he must *first* establish in himself a clear and independent title."

"I suppose the affair will soon become public," said Mr. Aubrey, with an air of profound depression, after much further conversation.

"Your position in the country, your eminence in public life, the singularity of the case, and the magnitude of the stake—all are circumstances undoubtedly calculated soon to urge the affair before the notice of the public," said Mr. Runnington.

"What disastrous intelligence to break to my family!" exclaimed Mr. Aubrey tremulously. "With what fearful suddenness it has burst upon us! But something, I suppose," he presently added with forced calmness, "must be done immediately?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Mr. Runnington. "Mr. Parkinson and I will immediately proceed to examine your title-deeds, the greater portion of which are, I understand, here in the Hall, and the rest at Mr. Parkinson's; and we will prepare, without delay, a case for the opinion of the Attorney-General, and also of the most eminent conveyancers of the kingdom. Who, by the way," said Mr. Runnington, addressing Mr. Parkinson—"who was the conveyancer that had the abstracts before him on preparing Mr. Aubrey's marriage-settlement?"

"Oh, you are alluding to the '*Opinion*' I mentioned to

you this evening?" inquired Mr. Parkinson. "I have it at my house, and will show it you in the morning."

"Oh, what infatuation has been mine! But you will take a little refreshment, gentlemen, after your journey?" said Mr. Aubrey suddenly, glad of the opportunity it would afford him of reviving his own exhausted spirits by a cup of wine, before returning to the drawing-room. He swallowed several glasses of wine without any immediately perceptible effect; and the bearers of the direful intelligence just communicated to the reader, after a promise by Mr. Aubrey to drive over to Grilston early in the morning and bring with him such of his title-deeds as were then at the Hall, took their departure. He made a powerful effort to control his feelings, so as to conceal, for a while at least, the dreadful occurrence of the evening. His face, however, on re-entering the drawing-room, somewhat alarmed Mrs. Aubrey; whom he at once quieted, by saying that he certainly *had* been annoyed—"excessively annoyed"—at a communication just made to him; "and which might, in fact, prevent his sitting again for Yatton." "Oh, that's the cause of your long stay? There, Doctor, am I not right?" said Mrs. Aubrey, appealing to Dr. Tatham. "Did I not tell you that this was something connected with politics? Charles, I do *hate* politics—give *me* a quiet home!" A pang shot through Mr. Aubrey's heart; but he felt that he had, for the present, succeeded in his object.

At an early hour in the morning his carriage drew up at Mr. Parkinson's door; and he brought with him, as he had promised, a great number of title-deeds and family documents. On these, as well as on many others which were in Mr. Parkinson's custody, that gentleman and Mr. Runnington were anxiously engaged during almost every minute of that day and the ensuing one; at the close of which, they had between them drawn up the rough draft of a case, with which Mr. Runnington set off for town by the mail; undertaking to lay it immediately before the Attorney-General, and also before one or two of the greatest conveyancers of the day, commending it to their best and earliest attention. He pledged himself to transmit their opinions, by the very first mail, to Mr. Parkinson; and both those gentlemen immediately set about active preparations for defending the ejectment.

About a week afterward, namely, on the 12th of January, Mr. Aubrey received the following letter from Mr. Parkinson, with three other enclosures:

"My Dear Sir:

"I have only just received, and at once forward to you, copies of the three opinions given by the Attorney-General, Mr. Mansfield and Mr. Crystal, the conveyancer and junior counsel secured by Mr. Runnington. I lament to find that they are all of a discouraging character. They are quite independent of each other, having been laid before their respective writers at the same moment; yet you will observe that all three of them have hit upon precisely the same point, viz., that the descendants of Geoffry Dreddlington had no right to succeed to the inheritance till there was a failure of the heirs of Stephen Dreddlington. If, therefore, our opponents have contrived to ferret out any one who satisfies that designation, I really fear we must prepare for a very serious struggle. I have been quietly pushing my inquiries in all directions, with a view to obtaining a clew to the case intended to be set up against us, and which you will find very shrewdly guessed at by the Attorney-General. *Nor am I the only party*, I find, in the field, who has been making pointed inquiries in your neighborhood; but of this more when we meet to-morrow."

Having read this letter, Mr. Aubrey sank back in his chair and remained motionless for more than a quarter of an hour. At length he roused himself and read over the opinions; the effect of which—as far as he could comprehend their technicalities—he found had been but too correctly given by Mr. Parkinson. Wave after wave of apprehension and agony passed over him, chilling and benumbing his heart within him. At length, with a groan that came from the depths of his heart, he sank back upon the sofa, and, clasping his hands, looked indeed forlorn. Presently the door was pushed hastily but gently open; and, first looking in to see that it was really he of whom she was in search, in rushed Mrs. Aubrey, pale and agitated, having been alarmed by his long-continued absence from the drawing-room, and the look of the servant from whom she had learned that his master had been for some time gone up-stairs.

"Charles! my love! my sweet love!" she exclaimed, rushing up to him, sitting down beside him, and casting her arms round his neck. "For mercy's sake—as you love me!—tell me, dearest Charles, what has happened!"

"Nothing—love—nothing," he replied.

"Oh! am not I your wife, dearest? Charles,, I shall really go distracted if you do not tell me what has happened. I know that something—something dreadful——" He put his arm round her waist, and drew her tenderly toward him.

"You soon *must* know all, my sweet love; and I take Heaven to witness, that it is principally on your account, and that of my children, that I——in fact, I did not wish any of you to have known it till——"

"You—are never going—to fight a duel?" she gasped, turning as white as death.

"Oh! no, no, Agnes! I solemnly assure you! If I could have brought myself to engage in such an unhallowed affair, would *this* scene ever first have occurred? No, no, my own love! I will conceal nothing, Agnes—they are bringing an action against me, which, if successful, may cause us all to quit Yatton—and it may be, forever."

"O Charles!" she murmured, her eyes riveted upon his, while she unconsciously moved still nearer to him. "Why is this? Is all lost? Do—my own Charles—let me know really the worst!"

"We are young, Agnes, and have the world before us. Health and honor are better than riches," said he. "Even should it be the will of Heaven that this affair should go against us—so long as they cannot separate us from each other, they cannot really hurt us." She suddenly kissed him with frantic energy, and a hysteric smile gleamed over her pallid, excited features.

"Calm yourself, Agnes!—calm yourself, for my sake!—as you love me!" His voice quivered. "Oh, how very weak and foolish I have been to yield to——"

"Are you going to tell Kate?" interrupted Mrs. Aubrey sorrowfully. "Surely, love, *you* have suffered enough through *my* weakness. Wait till to-morrow."

"No, Agnes—it was my own weakness which caused me to be surprised into this premature disclosure to you. And now I *must* meet her again to-night, and I cannot control either

my features or my feelings. Yes, poor Kate, she must know all to-night! I shall not be long absent, Agnes."

With slow step and heavy heart he descended to the library; rang the bell, and desired Miss Aubrey's maid to request her mistress to come down to him there, as soon as she was at leisure. When she entered, her eyes sparkled with vivacity, and a smile was on her beauteous cheek. Her dress was slightly disordered, and her hair half uncurled—the result of her sport with the little ones whom she had been seeing to bed.

"What merry little things, to be sure!" she commenced laughingly—"I could not get them to lie still a moment—popping their little heads in and out of the clothes. Why, Charles, how very—*very* grave you look to-night!"

"I want to speak to you, dear Kate," he commenced affectionately, "on a serious matter. And relying on your strength of mind, I have resolved to put you at once in possession of what I myself know."

"Do not keep me in suspense, Charles—I can bear anything but that! Let me at once know all. See if I do not hear it as becomes your sister," she said with forced calmness.

"I will tell you the worst, Kate—a strange claim is set up—by one I never heard of—to the whole of the property we now enjoy!"

"Do you mean to say that Yatton *is not ours!*" inquired Miss Aubrey, catching her breath.

"So, alas! my dearest Kate, it is said!"

"Must we, then, all leave Yatton?" said she, faintly, after a while.

"If this claim succeeds—but we shall leave it *together*, Kate."

She threw her arms round his neck, and wept bitterly.

"It seems, Kate," said he, with all the calmness he could assume—"at least they are trying to prove—that our branch of the family has succeeded to the property prematurely—that there is living an heir of the elder branch—that his case has been taken up by powerful friends; and—let me tell you the worst at once—even the lawyers consulted by Mr. Parkinson on my behalf take a most alarming view of the possibilities of the case that may be brought against us.

"Do you mean to say that Yatton is *not ours*?"

Remember, my only sister—my dearest Kate! you must support *me* in my trouble, as I will support you—we will support one another——"

"We will—we will!" interrupted Miss Aubrey.

After a minute or two she turned toward him with tears in her eyes, but tranquillized features. The struggle had been dreadful, though brief—her noble spirit recovered itself. The distressed brother and sister sat conversing for a long time, frequently in tears, but with infinitely greater calmness and firmness than could have been expected.

CHAPTER XI

HOW THE HERO WAS INTRODUCED TO THE FASCINATING MISS DORA QUIRK, AND WHAT HAPPENED AT ALIBI HOUSE

WOULD you have believed it? Notwithstanding all that had happened between Titmouse and Tag-rag, they positively got reconciled to one another—a triumphant result of the astute policy of Mr. Gammon.

Gammon saw that Tag-rag, under proper management, might be made very useful. He was a moneyed man; a selfish man; and, after his sort, an ambitious man. He had an only child, a daughter, and if Titmouse and he could only by any means be brought once more together, and a firm friendship cemented between them, Gammon saw several very profitable uses to which such an intimacy might be turned, in the happening of any of several contingencies which he contemplated as possible. In the event, for instance, of larger outlays of money being required than suited the convenience of the firm—could not Tag-rag be easily brought to accommodate his future son-in-law of £10,000 a year? Suppose, for instance, that after all their case should break down, and all their pains, exertions, and expenditure be utterly thrown away? Now, if Tag-rag could be quietly brought some fine day to the point of either making some actual advance, or entering into security for Titmouse—ah! that *would* do, said both Quirk and Gammon. But then Titmouse was a very unsafe instrument—an incalculable fool, and might commit himself too far!

"You forget, Gammon," said old Mr. Quirk. "I don't fear this girl of Tag-rag's—because only let Titmouse see—hem," he suddenly paused, and looked a little confused.

"To be sure—I see," replied Gammon, suddenly realizing the cause of Mr. Quirk's interest in Titmouse's matrimonial projects, altho he spoke quietly, and the thing passed off. "If either Miss Quirk or Miss Tag-rag becomes Mrs. Titmouse," thought he, "I am not the man I take myself for."

A few days after Titmouse's expulsion from Satin Lodge, without his having ever gone near Tag-rag's premises in Oxford Street, or, in short, seen or heard anything about him, or any one connected with him, he removed to small but very respectable lodgings in the neighborhood of Hatton Garden, provided for him by Mr. Quirk. Mrs. Squallop was quite affected while she took leave of Titmouse.

"I've always felt like a mother toward you, sir, in my humble way," said Mrs. Squallop in a very respectful manner, and curtsying profoundly.

"A—I've not got any small silver by me, my good woman," said Titmouse with a fine air, as he drew on his white kid glove.

"Lord, Mr. Titmouse!" said the woman, almost bursting into tears, "I wasn't asking for money, neither for me nor mine—only one can't help, as it were, feeling at parting with an old lodger, you know, sir——"

"Ah—ya-as—and all that! Well, my good woman, good-day, good-day."

"Good-by, sir—God bless you; now you're going to be a rich man!—Excuse me, sir."—And she seized his hand and shook it.

"You're a—devilish—impudent—woman—'pon my soul!" exclaimed Titmouse, his features filled with amazement at the presumption of which she had been guilty; and he strode down the stairs with an air of offended dignity.

"Well—I never!—*That* for you, you little brute," said Mrs. Squallop, snapping her fingers as soon as she had heard his last step on the stairs.

Mr. Gammon, having, after a very skillful effort, succeeded in reconciling Titmouse to a renewal of his acquaintance with Tag-rag, upon that gentleman's making a complete and abject apology for his late monstrous conduct, wended his way toward Oxford Street, and introduced himself once more to Mr. Tag-rag. On catching the first glimpse of Mr. Gammon, he started from his musing posture, not a little disconcerted. Tag-rag had a mortal dread of Gammon, who seemed to him to glide like a dangerous snake into the shop, so quietly, and *so deadly!* There was something so calm and imperturbable in his demeanor, so blandly crafty, so ominously gentle and soft in the tone of his voice, so penetrating in his

eye, and he could throw such an infernal smile over his features!

Gammon commenced, in a mild tone, with a very startling representation of the criminal liability which Tag-rag had incurred by his wanton outrage upon Mr. Titmouse, his own

"I've always felt like a mother towards you, sir; in my humble way"

guest, in violation of all the laws of hospitality. Tag-rag furiously alleged the imposition which had been practised on him by Titmouse; but he quite collapsed when Gammon assured him that the circumstance would not afford him the slightest justification. Having satisfied Tag-rag that

he was entirely at the mercy of Titmouse, who might subject him to both fine and imprisonment, Mr. Gammon proceeded to open his eyes to their widest stare of amazement by assuring him that Titmouse had been hoaxing him, and that really every week brought him nearer to the enjoyment of an estate in Yorkshire, worth £10,000 a year at the very lowest; that it was becoming an object of increasing anxiety to them to keep him out of the hands of money-lenders, who had already scented out their victim, and so forth.—Tag-rag turned very white, and felt sick at heart in the midst of all his wonder. His daughter had lost the golden prize! And through *his* misconduct! He could have sunk into the cellar! Mr. Gammon declared that he could not account for the singular conduct of Mr. Titmouse on the melancholy occasion in question, except by referring it to the excellent wines which he had too freely partaken of at Satin Lodge.

Tag-rag really, for a moment, scarcely knew where he was, who was with him, or whether he stood on his head or his heels, so delightful and entirely unexpected was the issue of Mr. Gammon's visit. As soon as his faculties had somewhat recovered themselves from their temporary confusion, almost breathless, he assured Gammon that no event in the whole course of his life had occasioned him such poignant regret as his treatment of Titmouse on the occasion in question; that he had undoubtedly followed unwittingly (he was ashamed to own) the example of Titmouse, and drunk far more than his usual quantity of wine. As for his daughter, she was growing thinner and thinner every day, and he thought he must send her to the country for a short time: in fact—poor girl!—she was plainly pining away!

To all this Mr. Gammon listened with a calm, delightful, sympathizing look, that quite transported Tag-rag, and satisfied him that Mr. Gammon implicitly believed every word that was being said to him. But when he proceeded to assure Tag-rag that this visit of his had been undertaken at the earnest instance of Mr. Titmouse himself, who had urged him, Mr. Gammon, to tender the olive-branch, in the devout hope that it might be accepted, Tag-rag's excitement knew scarce any bounds. Mr. Gammon wrote down Titmouse's direction, and assured Mr. Tag-rag that a call from him would be gratefully received by Mr. Titmouse; Tag-

rag squeezing his hands with painful energy as Gammon bade him adieu, saying he should not be himself for the rest of the day, and bowing the aforesaid Mr. Gammon down the shop with as profound an obsequiousness as if he had been the Lord High Chancellor.

The motive, so boldly and skillfully suggested by Gammon to Tag-rag as that impelling Titmouse to seek a reconciliation with him, was greedily credited by Tag-rag. He clapped his hat on his head and started off to Titmouse's lodgings, and fortunately caught that gentleman just as he was going out to dine at a neighboring tavern. If Tag-rag had been a keen observer, he could hardly have failed to discover aversion toward himself written in every feature and gesture of Titmouse; and also how difficult it was to be concealed. But his eagerness overbore everything, and took Titmouse quite by storm. Before Tag-rag had done with him, he had obliterated every trace of resentment in his little friend's bosom. Thoroughly as Gammon thought he had prepared Titmouse for the encounter and armed him at all points—'twas of no avail. Tag-rag poured such a monstrous quantity of flummery down the gaping mouth and insatiate throat of the little animal as at length produced its desired effect. Titmouse would have dined at Satin Lodge on the very next Sunday, in accordance with the pressing invitations of Tag-rag, but that he happened to recollect having engaged himself to dine that evening with Mr. Quirk, at his residence in Camberwell—ALIBI HOUSE. Mr. Quirk had soon seen through the designs upon Titmouse of Mr. Tag-rag; and justly considered that the surest method of rendering them abortive would be to familiarize Titmouse with a more lovely and attractive object for his best affections in Miss Dora Quirk, the luster of whose charms and accomplishments, there could be no doubt, would instantly efface the image of that poor, feeble, vulgar creature, Miss Tag-rag.

Titmouse promised to dine at Satin Lodge on the Sunday after, with which poor Mr. Tag-rag was obliged to depart content.

Titmouse spent several hours in preparing for an effective first appearance at the dinner-table at Alibi House. Since dining at Satin Lodge, he had considerably increased his wardrobe both in quantity and style. He now sported a pair

of tight black trousers, with pumps and gossamer silk stockings. He wore a crimson velvet waistcoat, with a bright blue satin under-waistcoat, a shirt frill standing out somewhat fiercely at right angles with his breast, and a brown dress-coat cut in the extreme of the fashion, the long tails coming to a point just about the backs of the knees. His hair was disposed with great elegance. He had discarded mustaches; but had a very promising imperial. The hair underneath his chin came out curling on each side of it, like two little tufts or horns. Over his waistcoat he wore his mosaic-gold watch-guard, and a broad black watered ribbon, to which was attached his eye-glasses—in fact, if he had dressed himself in order to sit to a miniature painter for his likeness, he could not have taken greater pains, or secured a more successful result.

The only points about his appearance with which he was at all dissatisfied, were his red hair, his thick red stumpy hands, and his round shoulders. The last matter gave him considerable concern, for he felt that it seriously interfered with a graceful carriage, and that the defect in his figure had been, after all, not in the least remedied by the prodigious padding of his coat. His protuberant eyes, of very light hue, had an expression that entirely harmonized with that of his open mouth; and both together gave you the image of a—complete fool. Having at length carefully adjusted his hat on his head, drawn on his white kid gloves, and enveloped himself in a stylish cloak with long black silk tassels, about four o'clock forth sallied Mr. Titmouse, carefully picking his way, in quest of the first coach that could convey him to Alibi House, or as near to it as might be. He soon found one, and, conscious that his appearance was far too splendid for an outside place, got inside. Four or five times did he put his head out of the window, calling out, in a loud peremptory tone—"Mind, coachman—Alibi House—Mr. Quirk's—Alibi House—do you hear, demme?" After which he would sink back into the seat with a magnificent air, as if he had not been used to give himself so much trouble. The coach at length stopped. "Halibi 'Ouse, sir," said the coachman, in a most respectful tone—"this is Mr. Quirk's, sir." When Titmouse pulled the bell, the door was quickly plucked open by a big footman, with

showy shoulder-knot and a pair of splendid red plush breeches, who soon disposed of Titmouse's cloak and hat, and led the way to the drawing-room, before our friend had had a moment's time even to run his hands through his hair.

"Your name, sir?" inquired the man, suddenly pausing—with his hand upon the handle of the door.

"Mr. Titmouse."

"I—*beg* your pardon, sir; *what* name?"

Titmouse, clearing his throat, repeated his name—open went the door, and—"Mr. Ticklemouse," said the servant very loudly and distinctly—ushering in Titmouse; on whom the door was the next instant closed. He felt amazingly flustered—and he would have been still more so, if he could have been made aware of the titter which pervaded the fourteen or twenty people assembled in the room, occasioned by the droll misnomer of the servant, and the exquisitely ridiculous appearance of poor Titmouse. Mr. Quirk, dressed in black, with knee breeches and silk stockings, immediately bustled up to him, shook him cordially by the hand, and led him up to the assembled guests. "My daughter—Miss Quirk; Mrs. Alderman Addlehead; Mrs. Deputy Diddledaddle; Mrs. Alias, my sister;—Mr. Alderman Addlehead; Mr. Deputy Diddledaddle; Mr. Bluster; Mr. Slang; Mr. Hug; Mr. Flaw; Mr. Viper; Mr. Ghastly; Mr. Gammon you know."

Miss Quirk was about five-and-twenty—a fat young lady, with flaxen hair curled formally all over her head and down to her shoulders, so that she very much resembled one of those great wax dolls seen in bazaars and shop windows, especially if looked at through a strong magnifying glass. Her complexion was beautifully fair; her eyes small; her face quite round and fat. From the die-away manner in which she moved her head, and the languid tone of her voice, it was obvious that she was a very sentimental young lady. She was dressed in white, and wore a massive gold chain—her fat arms being half covered with long kid gloves. She was sitting on the sofa, from which she did not rise when Titmouse was introduced—and, the moment after, she hid her face behind the album which had been lying on her knee, and which she had been showing to the ladies on each side of her; for, in fact, neither she nor any one else could, without the greatest difficulty, refrain from laughing at the mon-

keyfied appearance of Titmouse. The only man of gentlemanlike appearance in the room was Mr. Gammon; and he took an early opportunity of engaging poor Titmouse in conversation, and setting him comparatively at his ease.

"This is a very beautiful picture, Titmouse, isn't it?" said Gammon, leading him to the further corner of the drawing-room, where hung a small picture with a sort of curtain of black gauze before it, which Gammon lifting up, Titmouse beheld a picture of a man suspended from the gallows, his hands tied with cords before him, his head forced aside, and covered down to the chin with a white nightcap. 'Twas done with sickening fidelity, and Titmouse gazed at it with a shudder. "Charming thing, isn't it?" said Gammon with a very expressive smile.

"Y—e—e—s," replied Titmouse, his eyes glued to the horrid object.

"Very striking, a'n't it?" quoth Quirk, bustling up to them; "'twas painted for me by a first-rate artist, whose brother I very nearly saved from the gallows! Like such things?" he inquired with a matter-of-fact air, drawing down the black gauze.

"Yes, sir, uncommon—most uncommon."

"Well, I'll show you something *very* interesting! Heard of Gilderoy, that was hanged last year for forgery? Gad, my daughter's got a brooch with a lock of his hair in it which he gave me himself—a client of mine: within an ace of getting him off—flaw in the indictment—found it out myself—did, by gad! Come along, and I'll get Dora to show it to you!" and, putting Titmouse's arm in his, he led him up to the interesting young lady.

"Dora, just show my friend Titmouse that brooch of yours, with Gilderoy's hair."

"Oh, my dear papa, 'tis such a melancholy thing!" said she, at the same time detaching it from her dress and handing it to her papa, who, holding it in his hands, gave Titmouse, and one or two others who stood beside, a very interesting account of the last hours of the deceased Gilderoy.

"He was *very* handsome, papa, wasn't he?" inquired Miss Quirk with a sigh and a very pensive air.

"Wasn't bad-looking; but good looks and the condemned cell don't long agree together."

"Ah, papa!" exclaimed Miss Quirk in a mournful tone, and, leaning back in the sofa, she raised her handkerchief to her eyes.

"You are too sensitive, my love!" whispered her aunt, Mrs. Alias, squeezing the hand of her niece, who, struggling against her feelings, presently revived.

Fortunately dinner was then announced—Mr. Quirk gave his arm with an air of prodigious politeness to the gaunt Mrs. Alderman Addlehead, whose distinguished lord led down Miss Quirk—and the rest followed in no particular order—Titmouse arm in arm with Gammon, who took care to place him next to himself. It was really a dashing sort of dinner. Titmouse had never seen anything like it, and was quite bewildered—particularly at the number of different shaped and colored glasses, etc., etc., etc., placed opposite to him. He kept a constant eye on the movements of Gammon, and did whatever he did, as if the two had been moved by the same set of springs, and was thus saved innumerable embarrassments and annoyances. What chiefly struck his attention was a prodigious number of dishes, great and small, as if half-a-dozen dinners had been crowded into one; the rapidity with which they were changed, and plates removed, in constant succession; the incessant invitations to take wine that were flying about during the whole of dinner.

For a considerable while Titmouse was too much flurried to enjoy himself; but a few glasses of champagne succeeded in elevating his spirits to the proper pitch—and would soon have driven them far beyond it. Almost everybody, except the great folk at the top of the table, asked him to take wine; and he constantly filled his glass. In fact Gammon, recollecting a scene at his own chamber, soon perceived that, unless he interfered, Titmouse would be drunk long before dinner was over. The little man had not imagined earth to contain so exquisite a drink as champagne; and would have fallen down and worshiped it, as it came fizzing and flashing out of the bottle. Gammon earnestly assured him that he would be ill if he drunk so much—that many eyes were upon him—and that it was not the custom to do more than merely sip from his wine-glass when challenging or challenged. But Titmouse had taken a great quantity on board before Gammon thus interfered.

At length the long dinner drew toward its close, whereupon the old alderman on the intimation that the "ladies were going to withdraw," laid violent hands on Miss Quirk (he was a "privileged" old fool), and insisted on her singing his favorite song—"*My Friend and Pitcher.*" His request was so warmly seconded by the rest of the company, Titmouse as loud and eager as any, that she was fain to comply. She sung with some sweetness, and much self-possession. She carried Titmouse's feelings along with her from the beginning, as Gammon, who was watching him, perceived.

"Most uncommon lovely gal, isn't she?" whispered Titmouse, with great vivacity.

"Very!" replied Gammon dryly, with a slight smile.

"Shall I call out *encore?* A'n't that the word? 'Pon my soul, most lovely gal! she must sing it again."

"No, no—she wishes to go—'tis not usual: she will sing it for you, I dare say, this evening, if you ask her."

"Well—most charming gal! Lovely!"——

"Have patience, my dear Titmouse," said Gammon, in a low whisper, "in a few months' time you'll soon be thrown into much higher life than this—among *really* beautiful, and rich, and accomplished women"—[and, *thought* Gammon, you'll resemble a monkey that has found his way into a rich tulip-bed!]

"Fancy Miss Tag-rag standing beside her," whispered Titmouse scornfully.

"Ha, ha!" gently laughed Gammon—"both of them, in their way, are very worthy persons; but"—Here the ladies withdrew. 'Twas no part of Gammon's plans that Titmouse should become the son-in-law of either Quirk or Tag-rag. Mr. Gammon had formed already vastly different plans for him.

As soon as Quirk had taken the head of the table, and the gentlemen drawn together, the bottles were pushed round very briskly amid a lively conversation for some little time with sad results for poor Titmouse.

At length Mr. Quirk exclaimed, "Gentlemen, let me request you to fill your glasses—bumpers—for I have a toast to propose, in which you'll all feel interested when you'll hear who's the subject of it. It is a gentleman who is likely soon to be elevated to a station which Nature has formed him—hem! hem!—to adorn——"

"Mr. Quirk's proposing your health, Titmouse!" whispered Gammon to his companion, who, having been very restless for some time, had at length become quite silent—his head resting on his hand, his elbow on the table—his eyes languidly half open, and his face exceedingly pale. Gammon saw that he was in truth in a very ticklish condition.

"I—wish—you'd—let me—go out—I'm devilish ill"—said Titmouse, faintly. Gammon made a signal to Quirk, who instantly ceased his speech; and, coming down to Titmouse, he and Gammon hastily led him out of the room, and into the nearest bed-chamber, where he began to be very ill, and so continued for several hours. Titmouse continued severely indisposed during the whole of the night; and, early in the morning, it was thought advisable to send for a medical man, who pronounced Titmouse to be in danger of a bilious fever, and to require rest, and care, and medical attendance for some days to come.

It was several days before Titmouse was allowed, by his medical man, to quit his bedroom. It is impossible for any woman not to be touched by the sight of a sudden change effected in a man by severe indisposition and suffering—even be that man so poor a creature as Titmouse. When he made his first appearance before Miss Quirk, one afternoon, with somewhat feeble gait, and a languid air that mitigated, if it did not obliterate, the foolish and conceited expression of his features, she really regarded him with considerable interest, and, tho she might hardly have owned it even to herself, his expected good fortune invested him with a kind of subdued radiance. *Ten thousand a year!*—Miss Quirk's heart fluttered!

By the time that he was well enough to take his departure, she had, at his request, read over to him nearly half of that truly interesting work—the Newgate Calendar; she had sung to him, and played to him, whatever he asked her; and, in short, she felt that if she could but be certain that he would gain his great lawsuit, and step into ten thousand a year, she could *love* him. She insisted, on the day of his quitting Alibi House, that he should write in her album; and he very readily complied. It was nearly ten minutes before he could get a pen to suit him. At length he succeeded, and left the following interesting memento of himself, in the very center of a fresh page:

"Tittlebat Titmouse is My name.
England is My Nation,
London is My dwelling-Place,
And Christ is My Salvation.
"Tittlebat Titmouse."

Miss Quirk turned pale with astonishment and vexation on seeing this elegant and interesting addition to her album. Titmouse, on the contrary, looked at it with no little pride; for, having had a capital pen, and his heart being in his task,

"Tittlebat Titmouse is My name—"

he had produced what he conceived to be a very superior specimen of penmanship; in fact, the signature was by far the best he had ever written. When he had gone, Miss Quirk was twenty times on the point of tearing out the leaf which

had been so dismally disfigured; but on her father coming home in the evening, he laughed heartily—"and as to tearing it out," said he, "let us first see which way the verdict is."

Titmouse became, after this, a pretty frequent visitor at Alibi House; growing more and more attached to Miss Quirk. The indisposition I have been mentioning prevented him from paying his promised visit to Satin Lodge. On returning to his lodgings he found that Tag-rag had either called or sent every day to inquire after him with the most affectionate anxiety; and one or two notes lying on his table apprised him of the lively distress which the ladies of Satin Lodge were enduring on his account, and implored him to lose not a moment in communicating the state of his health, and personally assuring them of his safety.

Tho the image of Miss Quirk was ever before his eyes, Titmouse had cunning enough not to drop the slightest hint to the Tag-rags of the true state of his feelings. Whenever any inquiry, with ill-disguised anxiety, was made by Mrs. Tag-rag concerning Alibi House and its inmates, Titmouse would, to be sure, mention Miss Quirk, but in such a careless and slighting way as gave great consolation and encouragement to Tag-rag, his wife, and daughter. When at Mr. Quirk's, he spoke somewhat unreservedly of the amiable inmates of Satin Lodge. As often as he dared, he called at Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's office at Saffron Hill, and worried them not a little by inquiries concerning the state of his affairs, and the cause of the delay in commencing proceedings. As for Huckaback, Titmouse cut him entirely; saying that he was a devilish low fellow, and it was no use knowing him. He made many desperate efforts, both personally and by letter, to renew his acquaintance with Titmouse, but in vain. I may as well mention, by the way, that as soon as Snap got scent of the little money transaction between his friend and Huckaback, he called upon the latter, and tendering him twelve shillings, demanded up the document which he had extorted from Titmouse. Huckaback held out obstinately for some time—but Snap was too much for him, and talked in such a formidable strain about an indictment for conspiracy(!) and fraud, that Huckaback at length consented, on receiving twelve shillings, to deliver up the document to Snap, on condition of Snap's destroying it

on the spot. This was done, and so ended all intercourse—at least on this side of the grave—between Titmouse and Huckaback.

The sum allowed by Messrs. Quirk and Gammon to Titmouse was amply sufficient to have kept him in comfort; but it never would have enabled him to lead the kind of life which he desired—and he would certainly have got very awkwardly involved, had it not been for the kindness of Snap in advancing him, from time to time, such sums as his exigencies required. In fact, matters went on as quietly and smoothly as possible for several months—till about the middle of November, when an event occurred that seemed to threaten the total demolition of all his hopes and expectations.

He had not seen or heard from Messrs. Quirk or Gammon for nearly a fortnight; Snap he had not seen for nearly a week. At length he ventured to make his appearance at Saffron Hill, and was received with a startling coldness—a stern abruptness of manner, that frightened him out of his wits. All the three partners were alike—as for Snap, the contrast between his present and his former manner was perfectly shocking; he seemed quite another person. The fact was, that the full statement of Titmouse's claims had been laid before Mr. Subtle, the leading counsel retained in his behalf, for his opinion, before actually commencing proceedings; and the partners were indeed thunderstruck on receiving that opinion; for Mr. Subtle pointed out a radical deficiency of proof in a matter which, as soon as their attention was thus pointedly called to it, Messrs. Quirk and Gammon were amazed at their having overlooked, and still more at its having escaped the notice of their conveyancers.

Here was something like a deadlock, indeed!

"We're done, Gammon!" said Quirk with a dismayed air. Gammon seemed lost, and made no answer.

"Does anything—eh? Anything occur to you? Gammon, I *will* say this for you—you're a long-headed fellow!" Still Gammon spoke not.

"Gammon! Gammon! I really believe—you begin to see something."

"*It's to be done*, Mr. Quirk!" said Gammon at length, with a grave and apprehensive look, and a cheek paler than before.

"Eh? how? Oh, I see!—Know what you mean, Gammon," replied Quirk with a hurried whisper, glancing at both doors to see that they were safe.

"We must resume our intercourse with Titmouse, and let matters go on as before," said Gammon, with a very anxious, but, at the same time, a determined air.

"I—I wonder if what has occurred to *you* is what has occurred to me?" inquired Quirk in an eager whisper.

"Pooh! pooh! Mr. Quirk."

"Gammon, dear Gammon, no mystery! You know I have a deep stake in this matter!"

"So have I, Mr. Quirk," replied Gammon with a sigh. "However"—Here the partners put their heads close together, and whispered to each other in a low, earnest tone for some minutes. Quirk rose from his seat, and took two or three turns about the room in silence, Gammon watching him calmly.

To his inexpressible relief and joy, within a few hours of the happening of the above colloquy, Titmouse found himself placed on precisely his former footing with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH IS EXPLAINED THE SEEMING NECESSITY FOR A DANGEROUS CONSPIRACY BETWEEN MESSRS. GAMMON AND QUIRK IN BEHALF OF THE HERO

THE chief corner-stone suddenly found wanting in the glittering fabric of Mr. Titmouse's fortune, was a certain piece of evidence. Now, I can fancy that the reader has more than once asked himself the following question, viz.—How did Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap first come to be acquainted with the precarious tenure by which Mr. Aubrey held the Yatton property? Why, it chanced in this wise:

Some twelve years before the period at which this history commences, Mr. Parkinson had taken into his service an orphan boy of the name of Steggars, at first merely as a sort of errand-boy, and to look after the office. He soon, however, displayed so much sharpness, and acquitted himself so creditably, that in the course of a year or two he became a sort of clerk, and sat and wrote at the desk it had formerly been his sole province to dust. Higher and higher did he rise, and at length became acquainted with the whole course of business that passed through the office. Many interesting matters connected with the circumstances and connections of the neighboring nobility and gentry were thus constantly brought under his notice, and now and then set him thinking whether the knowledge thus acquired could not, in some way, and at some time or another, be turned to his own advantage; for he was utterly unworthy of the kindness and confidence of Mr. Parkinson, who little thought that in Steggars he had to deal with—a rogue in grain.

On the occasion of Mr. Aubrey's intended marriage with Miss St. Clair, a full abstract of his title was laid by Mr. Parkinson before his conveyancer, in order to advise and prepare the necessary instruments. Owing to inquiries sug-

gested by the conveyancer, additional statements were laid before him; and produced an opinion of a somewhat unsatisfactory description, from which I shall lay before the reader the following paragraph:

"There seems no reason for supposing that any descendant of Stephen Dreddlington is now in existence: still, *as it is by no means physically impossible that such a person may be in esse*, it would unquestionably be most important to the security of Mr. Aubrey's title to establish clearly the validity of the conveyance by way of mortgage, executed by Harry Dreddlington, and which was afterward assigned to Geoffry Dreddlington on his paying off the money borrowed by his deceased uncle: since the descent of Mr. Aubrey from Geoffry Dreddlington would, in that event clothe him with an indefeasible title at law, by virtue of that deed; and any equitable rights which were originally outstanding, would be barred by lapse of time. But the difficulty occurring to my mind on this part of the case is, that, unless Harry Dreddlington, who executed that deed of mortgage, survived his father (a point on which I am surprised that I am furnished with no information), the deed itself would have been mere waste parchment, as in reality the conveyance of a person who *never had any interest* in the Yatton property—and, of course, neither Geoffry Dreddlington, nor his descendant Mr. Aubrey, could derive any right whatever under such an instrument. In that case, such a contingency as I have above hinted at—I mean the existence of any legitimate descendant of Stephen Dreddlington—*might have a most serious effect upon the rights of Mr. Aubrey.*"

Now every line of this opinion did this quick-sighted young scoundrel copy out and deposit, as a great prize, in his desk, among other similar notes and memoranda, his master little wotting the while of what he was doing. Some year or two afterwards, Steggars decamped with the sum of £700 sterling, being the amount of money due on a mortgage which he had been sent to receive from a client of Mr. Parkinson's. Hot pursuit was made after the unfortunate delinquent, who was taken into custody two or three days after his arrival in town. He quickly found his way into Newgate. His natural sagacity assured him that his case was rather an ugly one; but hope did not desert him.

"Well, my kiddy," said Grasp, the grim turnkey; "here you are, you see—isn't you?"

"I think I am," replied Steggars, with a sigh.

"Well—and if you want to have a chance of not going across the water till you're a many years older, you'll get yourself defended, and the sooner the better, d'ye see. There's *Quirk, Gammon, and Snap*—my eyes! how they *do* thin this here place of ours, to be sure! Shall I send them to you?"

Steggars answered eagerly in the affirmative. Mr. Quirk took a lively interest in his new companion, and promised to do whatever he *could*. He hinted, however, that, as Mr. Steggars must be aware, a *little* ready money would be required, in order to fee counsel—whereat Steggars looked very dismal indeed. Old Mr. Quirk asked him if he had no friends who would raise a trifle for a "chum in trouble,"—and on answering in the negative, he observed the enthusiasm of the respectable old gentleman visibly and rapidly cooling down.

"But I'll tell you what, sir," said poor Steggars, suddenly, "if I haven't money, I may have *money's worth* at my command;—I've a little box, that's at my lodging, which those that got me knew nothing of—and in which there is a trifle or two about the families and fortunes of some of the first folk in Yatton, that would be precious well worth looking after, to those that know how to follow up such matters." Steggars, having first exacted from him a written promise to use his utmost exertions on his behalf, gave Mr. Quirk the number of the house where his precious box was, and a written order to the landlord to deliver it up to the bearer; after which Mr. Quirk shook him cordially by the hand, and having quitted the prison, made his way straight to the house in question, and succeeded in obtaining what he asked for. He faithfully defended Steggars, but alas! Steggars was found guilty, and sentenced to be transported for life.

Enraged at this issue, he sent a message the next day to Mr. Quirk requesting a visit from him. When he arrived, Steggars, in a very violent tone, demanded that his papers should be returned to him. 'Twas in vain that Mr. Quirk explained to him again and again his interesting position

with reference to his goods, chattels, and effects—*i.e.*, that, as a convicted felon, he had no further concern with them, and might dismiss all anxiety on that score from his mind. Steg-

"— I've a little box that's at my lodging * * and in which there is a trifle about the families and fortunes of the folk in Yatton"

gars hereat got more furious than before, and intimated plainly the course he should feel it his duty to pursue—that, if the papers in question were not given up to him as he desired, he should at once write off to his late employer, Mr.

Parkinson, and acknowledge how much further he (Steggars) had wronged him and his clients than he supposed of. Old Quirk very feelingly represented to him that he was at liberty to do anything that he thought calculated to relieve his excited feelings: and then Mr. Quirk took a final farewell of his client, wishing him health and happiness.

"I say, Grasp!" said he, in a whisper, to that grim functionary, as soon as he had secured poor Steggars in his cell, "that bird is a little ruffled just now—isn't he, think you?"

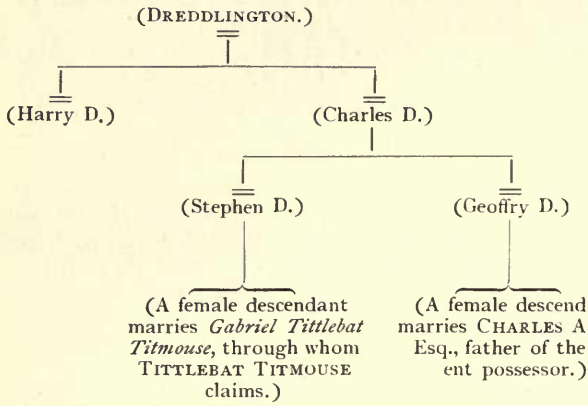
"Lud, sir, the nat'ralist thing in the world, considering——"

"Well—if he should want a letter taken to any one, whatever he may say to the contrary, you'll send it on to Saffron Hill—eh? Understand?—He may be injuring himself, you know;" and old Quirk with one hand clasped the huge arm of Grasp in a familiar way, and with the forefinger of the other touched his own nose, and then winked his eye.

"All right!" quoth Grasp, and they parted. Within a very few hours' time, Mr. Quirk received, by the hand of a trusty messenger, from Grasp, a letter written by Steggars to Mr. Parkinson; a long and eloquent letter to the purport and effect which Steggars had intimated. Mr. Quirk read it with much satisfaction, for it disclosed a truly penitent feeling, and then quietly put the letter in the fire as soon as he had read it. In due time Mr. Steggars, whose health had suffered from close confinement, caught frequent whiffs of the fresh sea-breeze, having set out, under most favorable auspices, for Botany Bay; to which distant but happy place, he had been thus fortunate in securing, so early, *an appointment for life.*

Such, then, were the miserable means by which Mr. Quirk became acquainted with the exact state of Mr. Aubrey's title; on first becoming apprised of which, Mr. Gammon either felt, or affected, great repugnance to taking any part in the affair. He appeared to suffer himself, at length, however, to be over-persuaded by Quirk into acquiescence; and, that point gained and Titmouse having been discovered, Gammon said he would at once prepare a case for the opinion of Mr. Lynx, whom he had pitched upon as the junior counsel in any proceedings which might be instituted in a court of

law. To make Mr. Lynx's opinion not altogether unintelligible, let us suppose the state of the Titmouse pedigree to be something like this:



"Now things standing thus, behold the astute Lynx advising in manner following; that is to say—

"It appears clear that the lessor of the plaintiff (*i.e.*, Tittlebat Titmouse) will be able to prove that Dreddlington (the common ancestor) was seized of the estate at Yatton in the year 1740; that he had two sons, Harry and Charles, the former of whom, after a life of dissipation, appears to have died without issue; and that from the latter (Charles) are descended Stephen, the ancestor of the lessor of the plaintiff, and Geoffry the ancestor of the defendant. Assuming therefore, that the descent of the lessor of the plaintiff from Stephen can be made out, as there appears every reason to expect, a clear *prima facie* case will be established on the part of the lessor of the plaintiff. As, however, it is suspected that Harry D. executed a conveyance in fee of the property, in order to secure the loan contracted by him from Aaron Moses, it will be extremely important to ascertain, and, if possible, procure satisfactory evidence, that his decease occurred before the period at which, by his father's death, that conveyance could have become operative upon the property; since it is obvious that, should he have survived his father,

that instrument, being outstanding, may form a complete answer to the case of the lessor of the plaintiff. The danger will be obviously increased, should the debt to Aaron Moses prove to have been paid off, as is stated to be rumored, by Geoffry D., the younger son of Charles D.: for, should that turn out to be the case, he would probably have taken a conveyance to himself, or to trustees for his benefit, from Aaron Moses—which being in the power of the defendant, Mr. Aubrey, would enable him to make out a title to the property, paramount to that now attempted to be set up on behalf of Mr. Titmouse. Every possible exertion, therefore, should be made to ascertain the precise period of the death of Harry D. The registries of the various parishes in which the family may have at any time resided, should be carefully searched; and an examination made in the churches and churchyards, of all tombstones, escutcheons, etc., belonging, or supposed to belong, to the Dreddlington family, and by which any light can be thrown upon this most important point. It appears clear that Dreddlington (the common ancestor) died on the 7th August, 1742:—the question, therefore, simply is, *whether the death of his eldest son (Harry) took place prior or subsequent to that period.* It is to be feared that the defendant may be in possession of some better evidence on this point than is possessed by the lessor of the plaintiff. The natural presumption certainly seems to be, that the son, being the younger and stronger man, was the survivor."

The above mentioned opinion of Mr. Lynx, together with that of Mr. Subtle entirely corroborating it, and a pedigree, were lying on the table, one day, at the office at Saffron Hill, before the anxious and perplexed parties, Messrs. Quirk and Gammon.

"Now, Gammon," said the former, "just let me see again where the exact hitch is—eh? You'll think me perhaps infernally stupid, but—curse me if I can see it!"

"See it, my dear sir? Here, *here!*" replied Gammon with sudden impatience, putting his finger two or three times to the words "*Harry D.*"

"Lord bless us! Don't be so sharp with one, Gammon! I know as well as you that that's *about* where the crack is; but what is the precise thing we're in want of, eh?"

"Proof, my dear sir, of the death of Harry Dreddlington some time—no matter when—previous to the 7th August, 1742; and in default thereof, Mr. Quirk, we are all flat on our backs, and had better never have stirred in the business."

Mr. Quirk gazed at Mr. Gammon with an anxious and puzzled look.

"Ah, by the way, an old TOMBSTONE, that would settle the business!"

"How d'ye make out—in a legal way, you know, Gammon—*when* a man died—I mean, of a *natural* death?" inquired Quirk, who was familiar enough with the means of proving the exact hour of certain *violent* deaths at Debtor's Door.

"Oh, there are various methods of doing so, my dear sir," replied Gammon carelessly. "Entries in family bibles and prayer-books, registers, tombstones—ay, by the way, an old TOMBSTONE," continued Gammon musingly, "that would settle the business!"

"An old tombstone!" echoed Quirk briskly. "Lord, Gammon, so it would! That's an idea!—I call that a decided idea, Gammon. 'Twould be the very thing!"

"The very thing!" repeated Gammon, pointedly. They remained silent for some moments.

"Snap could not have looked about him sharply enough, when he was down at Yatton!" at length observed Quirk, in a low tone flushing all over as he uttered the last words, and felt Gammon's cold gray eye settled on him like that of a snake.

"He could not, indeed, my dear sir," replied Gammon, while Quirk continued gazing earnestly at him, now and then wriggling about in his chair, rubbing his chin, and drumming with his fingers on the table.—"And now that you've suggested the thing, it's not to be wondered at—you know, it would have been an old tombstone—a sort of fragment of a tombstone, perhaps—so deeply sunk in the ground, probably, as easily to have escaped observation, eh? Does not it strike *you* so, Mr. Quirk?" All this was said by Gammon in a musing manner, and in a very low tone of voice; and he was delighted to find his words sinking into the eager mind of his companion.

"Ah, Gammon!" exclaimed Quirk, with a sound of partly a sigh and partly a whistle (the former being the exponent of the *true* state of his feelings, *i.e.* anxiety—the latter of what he wished to *appear* the state of his feelings, *i.e.* indifference).

"Yes, Mr. Quirk?"

"You're a deep devil, Gammon—I *will* say that for you!" replied Quirk, glancing toward each door, and, as it were, unconsciously drawing his chair a little closer to that of Gammon.

"Nay, my dear sir!" said Gammon, with a deferential and deprecating smile, "you give me credit for an acuteness I feel I do not deserve! If, indeed, I had not had *your* sagacity to rely upon, ever since I have had the honor of being

connected with you—ah, Mr. Quirk, you know you lead—I follow——"

"Gammon, Gammon! Come—your name's *Oily*——"

"In moments like these, Mr. Quirk, I say nothing that I do not feel," interupted Gammon gravely, putting to his nose the least modicum of snuff which he could take with the tip of his finger out of the huge box of Mr. Quirk, who, just then, was thrusting immense pinches every half minute up his nostrils. "Seriously, Mr. Quirk; I thoroughly appreciate your admirable caution in not confiding to any one—no, not even to me—the exact means by which you intend to extricate us from our present dilemma." Here Quirk got very fidgety, and twirled his watch-key violently.

"Hem! But—hem! Ay—a—a," he grunted, looking with an uneasy air at his calm astute companion; "I didn't mean so much as all *that*, either, Gammon; for two heads, in my opinion, are better than one. You *must* own that, Gammon!" said he, not at all relishing the heavy burden of responsibility which he felt that Gammon was about to devolve upon his (Quirk's) shoulders exclusively.

"'Tis undoubtedly rather a serious business on which we are now entering," said Gammon; "and I have always admired a saying which you years ago told me of that great man Machiavel——"

[Oh, Gammon! Gammon! You well know that poor old Mr. Quirk never heard of the name of that same Machiavel till this moment!]—

"That when great affairs are stirring, a master-move should be confined to the master-mind that projects it. I understand! I see! I will not, therefore, inquire into the precise means by which I am satisfied you will make it appear in due time (while I am engaged getting up the subordinate, but very harassing details of the general case) that *Henry Dreddlington died before the 7th of August, 1742.*" Here, taking out his watch—"Bless me, Mr. Quirk, how time passes!—Two o'clock! I ought to have been at Messrs. Gregson's a quarter of an hour ago."

"Stop—a moment or two can't signify! It—it," said Quirk hesitatingly, "it was *you*, wasn't it, that thought of the tombstone?"

"I!—my dear Mr. Quirk"—interupted Gammon, with a look of astonishment and deference.

"Come, come—honor among thieves, you know, Gammon!" said Quirk trying to laugh.

"No—it shall never be said that I attempted to take the credit of——" commenced Gammon; when a clerk entering, put an end to the colloquy between the partners, each of whom, presently, was sitting alone in his own room—for Gammon found that he was too late to think of keeping his engagement with Messrs. Gregson; if indeed he had ever made any—which, in fact, he had *not*. Mr. Quirk sat in a musing posture for nearly half an hour after he and Gammon had separated. "Gammon *is* a deep one! I'll be shot if ever there was his equal," said Quirk to himself, at length; and starting off his chair, with his hands crossed behind him, he walked softly to and fro. "I know what he's driving at—though he thought I didn't! He'd let me scratch my hands in getting the blackberries, and then he'd come smiling in to eat 'em! But—share and share alike—share profit, share danger, Master Gammon;—you may find that Caleb Quirk is a match for Oily Gammon—I'll have you in for it, one way or another!" Here occurred a long pause in his thoughts. "Really I doubt the thing's growing unmanageable—the prize can't be worth the risk!—*Risk*, indeed—'fore Gad—it's neither more nor less than——" Here a certain picture hanging, covered with black crape, in the drawing-room at Alibi House, seemed to have glided down from its station, and to stand before his eyes with the crape drawn aside—a ghastly object—eugh! He shuddered, and involuntarily closed his eyes. "How devilish odd that I should just *now* have happened to think of it!" he inwardly exclaimed, sinking into his chair, in a sort of cold sweat.

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Quirk," said Gammon, suddenly re-entering the room after about an hour's absence, during which he too had, like his senior partner, been revolving many things in his mind—"it has occurred to me that I had better immediately go down to Yatton, *alone*."

"Eh?" quickly interrupted Quirk, pricking up his ears. "Do you intend to play *Mackivel!* eh? What must you go down alone to Yatton for, Gammon?"

"Why, simply as a sort of pioneer—to reconnoiter the

churchyard—eh? I thought it might have been of service; but if——"

"Gammon, Gammon, your hand! I understand," replied Quirk, evidently vastly relieved—most cordially shaking the cold hand of Gammon.

"But, understand, Mr. Quirk," said he in a very peremptory manner, "no one upon earth is to know of my visit to Yatton except yourself."

He received a solemn pledge to that effect; and presently the partners separated, a little better satisfied with each other. Mr. Quirk paid one or two visits to the neighborhood of Houndsditch (a perfect hotbed of clients), where resided two or three gentlemen of the Jewish persuasion, who had been placed, from time to time, under considerable obligations by the firm of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, in respect of professional services rendered both to themselves and to their friends. One of them, in particular, had a painful consciousness that it was in old Mr. Quirk's power at any time, by a whisper, to place his neck in an unsightly noose that every now and then might be seen dangling from a beam opposite Debtor's Door, Newgate, about eight o'clock in the morning; him, therefore, every consideration of interest and gratitude combined to render subservient to the reasonable wishes of Mr. Quirk. He was a most ingenious little fellow, and had a great taste for the imitative arts—so strong a taste, in fact, that it had once or twice placed him in some jeopardy with the Goths and Vandals of the law, who characterized the noble art in which he excelled by a very ugly and formidable word, and annexed the most barbarous penalties to its practice.

What passed between him and old Quirk on the occasion of their interviews, I know not; but one afternoon, the latter, on returning to his office without saying anything to anybody, having bolted the door, took out of his pocket several little pieces of paper containing pretty little picturesque devices of a fragmentary character, with antique letters and figures on them—crumbling pieces of stone, some looking more and some less sunk in the ground, and overgrown with grass. After he had looked at them and carefully compared them one with another for some time, he folded them up in a sheet of paper, sealed it up—with certainly not the

steadiest hand in the world—and then deposited it in an iron safe.

As it happened, all these nefarious practices came to naught, for Mr. Gammon was fortunate enough to discover, in the churchyard at Yatton, conclusive testimony—in the shape of just such a looking tombstone as he had imagined—of the death of Harry Dreddlington before his father. As soon as he acquainted Mr. Quirk of the finding of this important piece of evidence, that gentleman, devoutly thanking God for His goodness, hurried to his strong box, unlocked it, took out a small package, and committed it to the flames.

CHAPTER XIII

DESCRIBES THE TRIAL IN WHICH THE HERO IS PUT IN POSSESSION OF TEN THOUSAND A YEAR!

THE ancient city of York exhibited, on the commission day of the Spring Assizes for the year 18—, the usual scene of animation and excitement. The High Sheriff, attended by an imposing retinue, went out to meet the Judges, and escorted them, amidst the shrill clangor of trumpets, to the Castle, where the commission was opened with the usual formalities. The Judges were Lord Widdrington, the Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench, and Mr. Justice Grayley, a puisne judge of the same court. Both were men of rigid integrity. Lord Widdrington, however, in temper was stern, arbitrary, and overbearing, and his manners were disfigured not a little by coarseness; while his companion was a man of exemplary amiability, affability, and forbearance. Lord Widdrington presided at the Civil Court (where, of course, would come on the important cause in which we are interested), and Mr. Justice Grayley in the Criminal Court.

Soon after the sitting of the court, on the ensuing morning—"Will your Lordship allow me," rose and inquired the sleek, smiling, and portly Mr. Subtle, dead silence prevailing as soon as he had mentioned the name of the cause about which he was inquiring, "to call your attention to a cause of *Doe on the demise of Titmouse v. Jolter*—a special jury cause, in which there are a great many witnesses to be examined on both sides—and to ask that a day may be fixed for it to come on?"

"Whom do you appear for, Mr. Subtle?" inquired his lordship.

"For the plaintiff, my lord."

"And who appears for the defendant?"

"The Attorney-General leads for the defendant, my lord,"

replied Mr. Sterling, who, with Mr. Crystal, was also retained for the defendant.

"Well, perhaps you can agree between yourselves upon a day, and in the mean time similar arrangements may be made for any other special jury causes that may require it." After due consultation, Monday week was agreed upon by the parties, and fixed by his lordship, for the trial of the cause.

See, then, the combatants in this memorable encounter: for *Titmouse*—Mr. SUBTLE, Mr. QUICKSILVER, Mr. LYNX; for Mr. *Aubrey*—Mr. ATTORNEY-GENERAL, Mr. STERLING, Mr. CRYSTAL.

Mr. Parkinson, being most unexpectedly summoned to Grilston quite late in the day before the trial in order to send up some deeds of one of his distinguished clients to London for the purpose of immediately effecting a mortgage, set off in a post-chaise, at top speed, in a very unenviable frame of mind; and by seven o'clock was seated in his office at Grilston, busily turning over a great number of deeds and papers, in a large tin case, when he happened to see one lying at the very bottom, which he had not before observed. It was not a large, but an old deed—and he took it up and hastily examined it. The deed he looked at bore an indorsement of the name of "*Dreddlington.*" After a hasty glance over its contents, he tried to recollect by what accident a document belonging to Mr. Aubrey could have found its way into the box containing Lord Yelverton's deeds; and it at length occurred to him that, about a twelvemonth before, Mr. Aubrey had proposed advancing several thousand pounds to Lord Yelverton, on mortgage of a portion of his lordship's property—but which negotiation had afterward been broken off; that Mr. Aubrey's title-deeds happened to be at the same time open and loose in his office—and he recollected having considerable trouble in separating the respective documents which had got mixed together. This one, after all, had been by some accident overlooked, till it turned up in this most timely and extraordinary manner!

Having hastily effected the object which had brought him back to Grilston, he ordered a post-chaise and four, and within a quarter of an hour was thundering back, at top speed, on his way to York, which, the horses reeking and foaming,

he reached a little after ten o'clock. He jumped out, with the precious deed in his pocket, the instant that his chaise-door was opened, and ran off, without saying more than "I'm gone to the Attorney-General's." This was heard by many passers-by and persons standing round; and it spread far and wide that something of the utmost importance had transpired with reference to the great ejectment cause of Mr. Aubrey. Soon afterward, messengers and clerks, belonging to Mr. Runnington and Mr. Parkinson, were to be seen running to and fro, summoning Mr. Sterling, Mr. Crystal, Mr. Mansfield, and also Mr. Aubrey, to an immediate consultation at the Attorney-General's.

The new-found deed which had occasioned all this excitement was a deed of confirmation by old Dreddlington, the father of Harry Dreddlington, of the conveyance by the latter to Geoffry Dreddlington, who, in the manner already mentioned to the reader, had got an assignment of that conveyance to himself. After the Attorney-General had satisfied himself as to the account to be given of the deed—the custody from whence it came, namely, the attorney for the defendant; Mr. Parkinson undertaking to swear, without any hesitation, that whatever deeds of Mr. Aubrey's he possessed, he had taken from the muniment-room at Yatton—the consultation broke up. Mr. Aubrey, on hearing the nature and effect of the instrument explained by the Attorney-General and Mr. Mansfield, and all his counsel, in short, concurring in opinion as to the triumphant effect which this instrument would produce on the morrow, may be pardoned for regarding it, in the excitement of the moment, as almost a direct interference of Providence.

As the castle clock finished striking nine on the appointed morning, Lord Widdrington took his seat, and the swearing of the special jury commenced. The court was crowded almost to suffocation; all the chief places being filled with persons of distinction in the county. The bar also mustered in great force; the Crown Court being quite deserted, altho a great murder case was going on there. The Civil Court was on the present occasion the point of attraction, not only on account of the interesting nature of the case to be tried, but of the keen contest that was expected between the Attorney-General and Mr. Subtle. The former, as he entered,

bowed to the judge, and then nodded and shook hands with several of the counsel nearest to him; then he sat down, and opening his bag, took out his huge brief, and began turning over its leaves with a calm and attentive air, occasionally turning round and conversing with his juniors. Every one present observed that the defendant's counsel and attorneys wore the confident looks of winning men; while their opponents, quick-sighted enough, also observed the circumstance, and looked, on that account alone, a shade more anxious than when they had entered the court. Mr. Subtle requested Gammon, whose ability he had soon detected, to sit immediately beneath him; next to Gammon sat Quirk, then Snap, and beside him Mr. Titmouse, who looked exceedingly pale, and dared hardly interchange a word with even Snap, who was just as irritable and excited as his senior partners. It was quickly known all over the court who Titmouse was. Mr. Aubrey scarcely showed himself in court all day, tho he stood at the door near the bench, and could hear all that passed; Lord De la Zouch and one or two personal friends standing with him, engaged, from time to time, in anxious conversation.

The jury having been sworn, Mr. Lynx rose, and intimated the nature of the pleadings in the cause. The Attorney-General then requested that all the witnesses might leave the court. As soon as the little disturbance occasioned by this move had ceased, Mr. Subtle rose, and in a low but distinct tone said, "May it please your Lordship—Gentlemen of the Jury: In this cause I have the honor to appear before you as counsel for the plaintiff; and it now becomes my duty to state as briefly as I can the nature of his case. It is impossible, gentlemen, not to notice the unusual interest excited by the cause; and which may be accounted for by the very large estates in this county which are sought this day to be transferred to a comparative stranger, from the family who have long enjoyed them, and of whom I am anxious to say everything respectful; for you will very soon find that the name on the record is that of only the nominal defendant; and, altho all that is *professed* to be this day sought for, is a very trifling portion of the property, your verdict will undoubtedly decide the question as to the true ownership and enjoyment of the large estates now held by the gentleman

who is the substantial defendant—I mean Mr. Aubrey, the Member of Parliament for the Borough of Yatton."

Aware of the watchful and formidable opponent who would in due time answer him, and also of being himself entitled to the general reply—to the last word—Mr. Subtle proceeded to state the nature of the plaintiff's case with the utmost brevity and clearness. Scarcely any sound was heard but that of the pens of the shorthand writers, and of the counsel taking their notes. Mr. Subtle, having handed up two or three copies of the pedigree which he held in his hand to the judge and jury, pointed out with distinctness and precision every link in the chain of evidence which he intended to lay before the jury; and having done this—having presented as few salient points of attack to his opponent as he possibly could—he sat down, professing his entire ignorance of what case could be set up in answer to that which he had opened.

As soon as he sat down, Mr. Quicksilver rose and called the first witness. "We're safe!" said the Attorney-General to Mr. Sterling and Mr. Crystal, with his hand before his mouth, and with the very faintest whisper that could be audible to those whom he addressed; and the witness having been sworn, they all resumed their seats and their writing. The first and the subsequent witness established one or two preliminary and formal points—the Attorney-General scarcely rising to put a question to them. The third witness was examined by Mr. Subtle with apparent unconcern, but really with exquisite anxiety. From the earnestness and attention with which the words of the witness were watched and taken down by both the judge and the counsel, who knew much better than the audience where the strain of the case commenced, it must have appeared to the latter that either Mr. Subtle underestimated, or his opponents overestimated, the value of the evidence now in process of being extracted by Mr. Subtle, in short, easy, pointed questions, and with a smiling unconcerned countenance.

"Not so fast, sir," gruffly interposed Lord Widdrington, addressing the witness.

"Take time, Mr. Jones," said Mr. Subtle blandly, fearful of ruffling or discomposing an important witness. The Attorney-General rose to cross-examine; pressed him quietly

but closely; varied the shape of his questions; now he soothed, then he startled by his sternness; but sat down, evidently having produced no impression. Thus it was with one or two succeeding witnesses; the Attorney-General, on each occasion, resuming his seat after his abortive efforts, with perfect composure. At length, however, by a very admirable and well-sustained fire of cross-questioning, he completely demolished a material witness; and the hopes of all interested in behalf of his clients rose high. Mr. Subtle, who had been all the while paring his nails, and from time to time smiling with a careless air (tho you might as safely have touched a tigress suckling her cubs, as attempted at that moment to disturb him, so absorbed was he with intense anxiety), believing that he could establish the same facts by another and, as he believed, a better witness, did not reexamine; but calling that other, with an air of nonchalance, succeeded in extracting from him all that the other had failed in, and in baffling all the attempts of the Attorney-General to affect his credit or disturb his equanimity.

The tombstone part of the case was got through easily; scarce any attempt being made on the part of Mr. Aubrey's counsel to resist or interfere with it. But the hottest part of the fight occurred at that point of the case where Titmouse's descent from Stephen Dreddlington was sought to be established. This gentleman, a very wild person, whose movements were very difficult to be traced, had entered the navy, and ultimately died at sea, as had always been imagined, single and childless. It was proved, however, that, so far from such being the case, he had married a person at Portsmouth of inferior station; and that by her he had a daughter, only two years before his death. Both mother and daughter, after undergoing great privation, removed to the house of a distant relative in Cumberland, where the mother afterward died, leaving her daughter only fifteen years old. When she grew up, she lived in some menial capacity in Cumberland, and ultimately married one Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse; who, after living for some years a cordwainer at Whitehaven, found his way to Grilston, in Yorkshire, in the neighborhood of which town he had lived for some years, in very humble circumstances. There he had married; and about two years afterward his wife died, leaving a son—our friend Tittlebat

Titmouse. Both of them afterward came to London; where, in four or five years' time, the father died, leaving the little Titmouse to flutter and hop about in the wide world as best he could.

During the whole of this part of the case Mr. Gammon had evinced his deep anxiety, and at a particular point—perhaps the crisis—his agitation was excessive; yet it was almost entirely concealed by his remarkable self-control. The little documentary evidence of which Gammon, at his first interview with Titmouse, found him possessed, proved at the trial, as Gammon had foreseen, of great importance. The evidence in support of this part of the case, and which it took till two o'clock on the ensuing afternoon to get through, was subjected to a most determined and skilful opposition by the Attorney-General, but in vain. The case had been got up with the utmost care, under the excellent management of Lynx; and Mr. Subtle's consummate tact and ability brought it, at length, fully and distinctly out before the jury.

"That, my lord," said he, as he sat down after re-examining his last witness, "is the case on the part of the plaintiff."

The Attorney-General then opened the defendant's case. After a graceful allusion to the distinguished character of his friend and client, Mr. Aubrey (to whose eminent position in the House of Commons he bore his personal testimony), and to the magnitude of the interest now at stake, he proceeded: "On every account, therefore, I feel sensible, gentlemen, to an unusual and most painful extent, of the very great responsibility now resting upon my learned friends and myself; lest any miscarriage of mine should prejudice in any degree the important interests committed to us, or impair the strength of the case which I am about to submit to you on the part of Mr. Aubrey: a case which, I assure you, unless some extraordinary mischance should befall us, will I believe annihilate that which with so much pains, so much tact, and so much ability, has just been laid before you by my learned friend Mr. Subtle; and establish the defendant in the safe possession of that large property which is the subject of the present most extraordinary and unexpected litigation. But, gentlemen, before proceeding so far as that, it is fitting that I should call your attention to the nature of the case set up on the part of the plaintiff, and the sort of evidence by

which it has been attempted to be supported; and I am very sanguine of being successful in showing you that the plaintiff's witnesses are not entitled to the credit to which they lay claim; and, consequently, that there is no case made out for the defendant to answer."

He then entered into a rigorous analysis of the plaintiff's evidence, contrasting each conflicting portion with the other with singular force and cogency; and commenting with powerful severity upon the demeanor and character of many of the witnesses. On proceeding, at length, to open the case of the defendant—"And here, gentlemen," said he, "I am reminded of the observation with which my learned friend concluded—that he was entirely ignorant of the case which we meant to set up in answer to that which he had opened on the part of the plaintiff. Gentlemen, it would have been curious, indeed, had it been otherwise—had my friend's penetrating eye been able to inspect the contents of our strong-box—and so become acquainted with the evidence on which my client rests his title to the property now in dispute. He has, however, succeeded in entitling himself to information on that point; and he shall have it—and to his heart's content." Here Mr. Subtle cast a glance of smiling incredulity toward the jury, and defiance toward the Attorney-General, "I will now concede to my learned friend every inch of the case which he has been endeavoring to make out; that he has completely established his pedigree. Mind, gentlemen, I concede this only for the purpose of the case which I am about to lay before you." He then mentioned the conveyance by Harry Dreddlington of all his interest—— "You forget that he died in his father's lifetime, Mr. Attorney-General," interposed Mr. Subtle, with a placid smile, and the air of a man who is suddenly relieved from a vast pressure of anxiety.

"Not a bit of it, gentlemen, not a bit of it—'tis a part of my case. My learned friend is quite right; Harry Dreddlington *did* die in his father's lifetime:—but——" Here Mr. Subtle gazed at the Attorney-General with unaffected curiosity; and, when the latter came to mention "the *deed of confirmation* by the father of Harry Dreddlington," an acute observer might have observed a slight change of color in Mr. Subtle. Mr. Quicksilver went on writing—for he was entirely out of his depth, and therefore occupied himself with thinking over an

article he was writing for some political review. Mr. Lynx looked at the Attorney-General as if he expected every instant to receive a musket-ball in his breast.

"What, '*confirm*' a *nullity*, Mr. Attorney-General?" interrupted Mr. Subtle, laying down his pen with a smile of derision; but a moment or two afterward, "Mr. Mortmain," said he, in a hasty whisper, "what do you think of this? Tell me—in four words—" The conveyancer, his eye glued to the face of the Attorney-General the while, muttered hastily something about—*operating as a new grant—as a new conveyance.*

"Pshaw! I mean what's the *answer* to it?" muttered Mr. Subtle impatiently; but his countenance preserved its expression of smiling nonchalance. "You will oblige me, Mr. Mortmain," he by-and-by whispered, in a quiet but peremptory tone, "by giving your utmost attention to the question as to the effect of this deed—so that I may shape my objection to it properly when it is tendered in evidence. If it really have the legal effect attributed to it, and which I suspect is the case, we may as well shut up our briefs. I *thought* there must be some such cursed point or other in the background."

Gammon saw the real state of Mr. Subtle's mind, and his cheek turned pale, but he preserved a smile on his countenance, as he sat with his arms folded. Quirk eyed him with undisguised agitation, scarce daring to look up at Mr. Subtle. Titmouse, seeing a little dismay in his camp, turned very white and cold, and sat still, scarce daring to breathe; while Snap looked like a terrier going to have its teeth pulled out.

At length the Attorney-General, after stating that, in addition to the case which he had intimated, as resting mainly on the deed of confirmation, he should proceed to prove the pedigree of Mr. Aubrey, sat down, having spoken about two hours and a half, expressing his conviction that when the defendant's evidence should have been closed, the jury, under his Lordship's direction, would return a verdict for the defendant; and that, too, without leaving the jury-box, where, by their long and patient attention, they had so honorably acquitted themselves of the important duty imposed upon them by the constitution.

"James Parkinson!" exclaimed Mr. Sterling, quietly but

distinctly as the Attorney-General sat down. "You are the attorney for the defendant?" inquired Mr. Sterling, as soon as the witness had been sworn. "Do you produce a conveyance between Harry Dreddlington and Moses Aaron?" etc. (specifying it.) It was proved and put in, without much opposition. So also was—the assignment from Moses Aaron to Geoffry Dreddlington.

"Do you also produce a deed between Harry Dreddlington the elder and Geoffry Dreddlington?" and he mentioned the date and names of all the parties. Mr. Parkinson handed in the important document.

"Stay, stay; where did you get that deed, Mr. Parkinson?" inquired Mr. Subtle sharply, extending his hand for the deed.

"From my office at Grilston, where I keep many of Mr. Aubrey's title-deeds."

"When did you bring it hither?"

"About ten o'clock last night, for the purpose of this trial."

"How long has it been at your office?"

"Ever since I fetched it, a year or two ago, with other deeds, from the muniment-room of Yatton Hall."

"How long have you been solicitor to Mr. Aubrey?"

"For this ten years, and my father was solicitor to his father for twenty-five years."

"Will you swear that this deed was in your office before the proceedings in this action were brought to your notice?"

"I have not the slightest doubt in the world."

"That does not satisfy me, sir. Will you *swear* that it was?"

"I *will*, sir," replied Mr. Parkinson firmly. "It never attracted any more notice from me than any other of Mr. Aubrey's deeds, till my attention was drawn to it in consequence of these proceedings."

"Has any one access to Mr. Aubrey's deeds at your office but yourself?"

"None that I know of; I keep all the deeds of my clients that are at my office in their respective boxes, and allow no one access to them; except under my immediate notice, and in my presence."

Then Mr. Subtle sat down.

"My lord, we now propose to put in this deed," said the Attorney-General, unfolding it.

"Allow me to look at it, Mr. Attorney," said Mr. Subtle. It was handed to him; and he, his juniors, and Mr. Mortmain, rising up, were engaged most anxiously in scrutinizing it for some minutes. Mortmain having looked at the stamp, sat down, and opening his bag hastily drew out an old well-worn volume, which contained all the stamp acts that had ever been passed from the time of William the Third, when, I believe, the first of those blessings was conferred upon this country. First he looked at the deed—then at his book—then at the deed again; and at length might be seen with earnest gestures, putting Mr. Subtle in possession of his opinion on the subject. "My Lord," said Mr. Subtle after a pause, "I object to this instrument being received as evidence, on account of the insufficiency of the stamp." This produced quite a sensation in court. Mr. Subtle then proceeded to mention the character of the stamp affixed to the deed, and read the act which was in force at the time that the deed bore date; and after a few additional observations, sat down, and was followed by Mr. Quicksilver and Mr. Lynx. Then arose the Attorney-General, having in the mean time carefully looked at the Act of Parliament, and submitted to his Lordship that the stamp was sufficient; being followed by his juniors. Mr. Subtle replied at some length.

"I certainly entertain some difficulty on the point," said his Lordship, "and will mention the matter to my brother Grayley." Taking with him the deed, and Mr. Mortmain's Stamp Acts, his lordship left the court, and was absent a quarter of an hour—half an hour—three quarters of an hour; and at length returned.

"I have consulted," said he, as soon as he had taken his seat, amidst the profoundest silence, "my brother Grayley, and we have very fully considered the point. My brother happens, fortunately, to have by him a manuscript note of a case in which he was counsel, about eighteen years ago, and in which the exact point arose which exists in the present case." He then read out of a thick manuscript book, which he had brought with him from Mr. Justice Grayley, the particulars of the case alluded to, and which was certainly almost precisely similar to those then before the court. In the case referred to, the stamp had been held sufficient; and so, his Lordship and his brother Grayley were of opinion, was the

stamp in the deed then before him. The cloud which had settled upon the countenances of the Attorney-General and his party, here flitted over to and settled upon those of his opponents. "Your Lordship will perhaps take a note of the objection," said Mr. Subtle, somewhat chagrined. Lord Widdrington nodded, and immediately made the requisite entry in his notes.

"*Now*, then, we propose to put in and read this deed," said the Attorney-General, with a smile of suppressed triumph, holding out his hand toward Mr. Lynx, who was spelling over it very eagerly—"I presume my learned friend will require only the operative parts to be read"—here Lynx, with some excitement, called his leader's attention to something which had occurred to him in the deed: up got Quicksilver and Mortmain; and presently——

"Not quite so fast, Mr. Attorney, if you please," said Mr. Subtle with a little elation of manner—"I have another, and I apprehend a clearly fatal objection to the admissibility of this deed, till my learned friend shall have accounted for an ERASURE——"

"Erasure!" echoed the Attorney-General with much surprise—"Allow me to see the deed;" and he took it with an incredulous smile, which, however, disappeared as he looked more and more closely at the instrument: Mr. Sterling, Mr. Crystal, and Mr. Mansfield also looking extremely serious.

"I've hit them *now*," said Mr. Subtle to those behind him, as he leaned back, and looked with no little triumph at his opponents—"by Jove!—was there ever anything so lucky in this world before?" From what apparently inadequate and trifling causes often flow great results! The plain fact of the case was merely this: The attorney's clerk, in copying out the deed, which was one of considerable length, had written four or five words by mistake; and fearing to exasperate his master by rendering necessary a new deed and stamp, and occasioning trouble and delay, neatly scratched out the erroneous words, and over the erasure wrote the correct ones. As he was the party who was entrusted with seeing to and witnessing the execution of the instrument, he of course took no notice of the alteration, and—see the result! The ownership of an estate of ten thousand a year about to turn upon the effect of this erasure!

"Hand me up the deed," said the Judge; and inspected it minutely for a minute or two.

"Has any one a magnifying-glass in court?" inquired the Attorney-General, with a look of increasing anxiety. No one happened to have one.

"Is it necessary, Mr. Attorney?" said Lord Widdrington, handing down the instrument to him with an ominous look.

"Well—you object, of course, Mr. Subtle—as I understand you—that this deed is void, on account of an erasure in a material part of it?" inquired Lord Widdrington.

"That is my objection, my lord," said Mr. Subtle, sitting down.

"Now, Mr. Attorney," continued the judge, turning to the Attorney-General, prepared to take note of any observations he might offer. The spectators, the whole court—were aware that the great crisis of the case had arrived; and there was a sickening silence. The Attorney-General, with perfect calmness and self-possession, immediately addressed the court in answer to the objection. That there *was* an erasure, which, owing to the hurry with which the instrument had been looked at, had been overlooked, was indisputable; of course the Attorney-General's argument was that it was an erasure in a part not material; but it was easy to see that he spoke with the air of a man who argues *contra spem*. What he said, however, was pertinent and forcible; the same might be said of Mr. Sterling and Mr. Crystal; but they were all plainly *graveled*. Mr. Subtle replied with cruel cogency; after which Lynx rose, and in a business-like way, with only a word or two, put the point again fully before Lord Widdrington.

"Well," said Lord Widdrington, when Mr. Lynx had done, "I own I feel no doubt at all upon the matter; but as it is certainly of the greatest possible importance, I will just see how it strikes my brother Grayley." With this he took the deed in his hand and quitted the court. He touched Mr. Aubrey, in passing to his private room, holding the deed before him. After an absence of about ten minutes, Lord Widdrington returned.

"Silence! silence there!" bawled the crier; and the bustle had soon subsided into profound silence.

"I entertain no doubt, nor does my brother Grayley," said

Lord Widdrington, "that I ought not to receive this deed in evidence, without accounting for an erasure occurring in a clearly essential part of it. Unless, therefore, you are prepared, Mr. Attorney, with any evidence as to this point, I shall not receive the deed."

There was a faint buzz all over the court—a buzz of excitement, anxiety, and disappointment. The Attorney-General consulted for a moment or two with his friends.

"Undoubtedly, my lord, we are not prepared with any evidence to explain an appearance which has taken us entirely by surprise. After this length of time, my lord, of course——"

"Certainly—it is a great misfortune for the parties—a great misfortune. Of course you tender the deed in evidence?" he continued, taking a note.

"We do, my lord, certainly."

You should have seen the faces of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, as they looked at Mr. Parkinson, with an agitated air, returning the rejected deed to the bag from which it had been lately taken with so confident and triumphant an air!—The remainder of the case, which had been opened by the Attorney-General on behalf of Mr. Aubrey, was then proceeded with: but in spite of all their assumed calmness, the disappointment and distress of his counsel were perceptible to all. They were now dejected—they felt that the cause was lost, unless some extraordinary good fortune should yet befall them. They were not long in establishing the descent of Mr. Aubrey from Geoffry Dreddlington. It was necessary to do so; for, grievously as they had been disappointed in failing to establish the title paramount, founded upon the deed of confirmation of Mr. Aubrey, it was yet an important question for the jury whether they believed the evidence adduced by the plaintiff to show title in himself.

"That, my lord, is the defendant's case," said the Attorney-General, as his last witness left the box; and Mr. Subtle then rose to reply. He felt how unpopular was his cause; that almost every countenance around him bore a hostile expression. Privately, he loathed his case when he saw the sort of person for whom he was struggling. All his sympathies—for he was a very proud, haughty man—were

on behalf of Mr. Aubrey, whom by name and reputation he well knew; with whom he had often sat in the House of Commons. Now, conspicuous before him, sat his little monkey-client, Titmouse—a ridiculous object, and calculated if there were any scope for the influence of prejudice, to ruin his own cause by the exhibition of himself before the jury. But Mr. Subtle was a high-minded English advocate; and if he had seen Miss Aubrey in all her loveliness, and knew her all depended upon any exertions he could make for her, he could hardly have exerted himself more successfully than he did on the present occasion against her.

And such, at length, was the effect which that exquisitely skilful advocate produced, in his address to the jury, that he began to bring about a change in the feelings of most around him: even the eye of scornful beauty began to direct fewer glances of indignation and disgust upon Titmouse, as Mr. Subtle's irresistible rhetoric drew upon their sympathies in his behalf. "My learned friend, the Attorney-General, gentlemen, dropped one or two expressions of a somewhat disparaging tendency, in alluding to my client, Mr. Titmouse; and shadowed forth a disadvantageous contrast between the obscure and ignorant plaintiff, and the gifted defendant. Good God, gentlemen! and is my humble client's misfortune to become his fault? If he be obscure and ignorant, unacquainted with the usages of society, deprived of the blessings of a superior education—if he have contracted vulgarity, *whose fault is it?*—Who has occasioned it? Who plunged him and his parents before him into an unjust poverty and obscurity, from which Providence is about this day to rescue him, and put him in possession of his own? Gentlemen, if topics like these must be introduced into this case, I ask you *who is accountable* for the present condition of my unfortunate client? Is he, or are those who have been, perhaps unconsciously, but still unjustly, so long reveling in the wealth that is his? Gentlemen, in the name of everything that is manly and generous, I challenge your sympathy, your commiseration, for my client."

Here Titmouse, who had been staring up open-mouthed for some time at his eloquent advocate, and could be kept quiet no longer by the most vehement efforts of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, rose up in an excited manner,

exclaiming, "Bravo! bravo, bravo, sir! 'Pon my life, capital! It's quite true—bravo! bravo!"

His astounded advocate paused at this unprecedented interruption. "Take the puppy out of court, sir, or I will not utter one word more," said he in a fierce whisper to Mr. Gammon.

"Who is that? Leave the court, sir! Your conduct is most indecent, sir! I have a great mind to commit you, sir!" said Lord Widdrington, directing an awful look down to the offender, who had turned of a ghastly whiteness.

"Have mercy upon me, my lord! I'll never do it again," he groaned, clasping his hands, and verily believing that Lord Widdrington was going to take the estate away from him.

Snap at length succeeded in getting him out of court, and after the excitement occasioned by this irregular interruption had subsided, Mr. Subtle resumed:

"Gentlemen," said he in a low tone, "I perceive that you are moved by this little incident; and it is characteristic of your superior feelings. Inferior persons, destitute of sensibility or refinement, might have smiled at eccentricities which occasion you only feelings of greater commiseration. I protest, gentlemen——" His voice trembled for a moment, but he soon resumed his self-possession; and, after a long and admirable address, sat down confident of the verdict.

"If we lose the verdict, sir," said he, bending down and whispering into the ear of Gammon, "we may thank that execrable little puppy for it." Gammon changed color, but made no reply.

Lord Widdrington summed up the case to the jury, with his usual care and perspicacity. Both judge and jury then retired. Candles were lit in the court, which continued crowded to suffocation. Few doubted which way the verdict would go. Fatigued as must have been most of the spectators with a two-days' confinement and excitement, scarce a person thought of quitting till the verdict had been pronounced. After an hour and a half's absence, a cry was heard—"Clear the way for the jury," and one or two officers, with their wands, obeyed the directions. As the jury were re-entering their box, struggling with a little difficulty through the crowd, Lord Widdrington resumed his seat upon the bench.

"Gentlemen of the jury," inquired the associate, "are you agreed upon the verdict? Do you find your verdict for the plaintiff, or for the defendant?"

"FOR THE PLAINTIFF," replied the foreman; on which the officer, amidst a kind of blank dismayed silence, making at the same time some hieroglyphics upon the record, muttered—"*Verdict for the plaintiff.—Damages, one shilling. Costs, forty shillings;*" while another functionary bawled out, amidst the increasing buzz in the court, "Have the goodness to wait, gentlemen of the jury. You will be paid immediately." Whereupon to the disgust and indignation of the unlearned spectators, and the astonishment of some of the gentlemen of the jury themselves—many of them the very first men of the county—Snap jumped up on the form, pulled out his purse with an air of exultation, and proceeded to remunerate Sir Godolphin Fitzherbert and his companions with the sum of two guineas each. Proclamation was then made, and the court adjourned till the next morning.

As soon as Titmouse had been ejected from the court, he began to cry bitterly, wringing his hands, and asking every one about him if he thought he could get in again, because it was his case that was going on. His eyes were red and swollen with weeping; and his little breast throbbed violently as he walked from one door of the court to the other. He made many ineffectual attempts to persuade the doorkeeper, who had assisted in his extrusion, to readmit him; but the incorruptible janitor was proof against a sixpence—even against a shilling; and at length Titmouse gave himself up to despair, for consider what a horrid interval of suspense he had to endure, from the closing of Mr. Subtle's speech till the delivery of the verdict. But at length, through this portentous and apparently impenetrable cloud burst the rich sunlight of success.

"Mr. Titmouse!—Mr. Titmouse!—Mr. Tit——"

The voice that called him was a blessed voice—a familiar voice—the voice of Mr. Gammon. In a moment or two Mr. Gammon had grasped both Mr. Titmouse's hands. "My dear, dear Mr. Titmouse, I congratulate you! You are victorious! God grant you long life to enjoy your fortune! God bless you, Titmouse!" Mr. Titmouse had gone very white, and for a while spoke not, but stood staring at Mr.

"I congratulate you –
You are victorious!"

Gammon, as if he was hardly aware of the importance of his communication.

"I've really *won?* It a'n't a joke or a dream?" inquired Titmouse with quickly increasing excitement, and a joyous expression bursting over his features, which became suddenly flushed.

"A joke?—the best you'll ever have. A dream?—that will last your life. Thank God, Mr. Titmouse, the battle's ours; we've defeated all their villainy!"

"Tol de rol! Tol de rol! Tol de lol, lol, lol, rido!—Ah!" he added in a loud truculent tone as Lord De la Zouch and Mr. Aubrey slowly passed him—"Done for, you know—'pon my life!—turned the tables!—*that* for you!" said he, snapping his fingers.

"Aubrey, it's against you—all is lost; the verdict is for the plaintiff!" said Lord De la Zouch in a hurried, agitated whisper, as he grasped the hand of Mr. Aubrey, whom he had quitted for an instant to hear the verdict pronounced. Mr. Aubrey for some moments spoke not.

"God's will be done!" at length said he in a low tone, or rather in a faint murmur. More than a dozen gentlemen, who came crowding out, grasped his hand with great energy and vehemence.

"God bless you, Aubrey! God bless you!" said several voices, their speakers wringing his hand with great vehemence as they spoke.

"Let us go," said Lord De la Zouch, putting Mr. Aubrey's arm in his own, and leading him away from a scene of distressing excitement, too powerful for his exhausted feelings.

They walked on for some time in silence. Soon afterward they parted—for Lord De la Zouch perceived that his unfortunate companion wished to be alone. He wrung Mr. Aubrey's hands in silence, and turned in the direction of his hotel. Mr. Aubrey made for his lodgings. The instant that he set his foot within the door, he was locked in the impassioned embrace of his wife and sister. None of them spoke for some moments.

"Dearest Charles!—we've heard it all—we know it all!" at length they exclaimed in a breath. "Thank God, it is over at last—and we know the worst!—Are you well, dearest Charles?" inquired Mrs. Aubrey with fond anxiety.

"Thank God, my Agnes, I am well!" said Mr. Aubrey, much excited, "and that the dreadful suspense is at an end; and thank God for the fortitude with which you bear the result! And how are *you*, my excellent friend?" continued he, addressing Dr. Tatham, and grasping his hands; "how it refreshes my heart to see you!"

"God Almighty bless you all, my dear friends!" replied Dr. Tatham, powerfully affected. "Believe that all this is from HIM! He has wise ends in view, tho we see not nor comprehend them! *Faint not when ye are rebuked of Him! If ye faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small!* But I rejoice to see your resignation!"

"I assure you all," said Aubrey, "I feel as if a very mountain had been lifted off my heart! How blessed am I in such a wife and sister!" A heavenly smile irradiated his pale features—and he clasped his wife and then his sister in his arms. They wept as they tenderly returned his embrace.

"Heaven," said he, "that gave us all, has taken all: why should we murmur? He will enable us, if we pray for His assistance, to bear with equanimity our present adversity, as well as our past prosperity! Come, Agnes! Kate! play the woman!"

Somewhat different was the mode in which the night was spent by the victorious party. Gammon, as has been seen, was the first to congratulate Titmouse on his splendid success. The next was old Quirk—who, with a sort of conviction that he should find Gammon beforehand with him—bustled out of court, leaving Snap to pay the jury, settle the court-fees, collect the papers, and so forth. Both Quirk and Snap (as soon as he was at liberty) exhibited a courtesy toward Titmouse which had a strong dash of reverence in it, such as was due to the possessor of ten thousand a year; but Gammon exhibited the tranquil matter-of-fact confidence of a man who had determined to be, and indeed knew that he *was*, the entire master of Titmouse.

"We must make a night on 't, eh?" quoth Mr. Quirk, with an excited air. His partners assented to it, as did Mr. Titmouse; and cold beef, sausages, fowl, ham, beef-steaks, and mutton-chops were ordered to be in readiness in half-an-hour's time. Soon afterward Mr. Titmouse followed the chambermaid to his new bedroom.

"This is the room we always give to quality folk—when we get them," said she, as she set his candle on the drawers, and looked with a little triumph around the room.

"Ah—yes!—'pon my soul—quite right—always do your best for quality!—Lovely gal—eh?" Here he chucked her under the chin and seemed disposed to imprint a kiss upon her cheek: but, with a "Lord, sir, that's not the way quality folks behave!" she modestly withdrew. While Messrs. Quirk and Snap were, after their sort, as excited as even Mr. Titmouse was, Gammon, retiring to his bedroom, and ordering thither pens, ink, and paper, sat down and wrote the following letter:

"My dear Sir—The very first leisure moment I have I devote to informing you, as one of the most intimate friends of our highly respected client, Mr. Titmouse, that the jury have returned a verdict declaring him entitled to the whole of the estates at Yatton (ten thousand a year rent-roll, at least), and, by consequence, to an immense accumulation of bygone rents, which must be made up to him by his predecessor.

"To you, my dear sir, as an early and valued friend of our interesting client, I sit down to communicate the earliest intelligence of this most important event; and I trust that you will, with our respectful compliments, communicate this happy event to your amiable family. He begs me to express his most cordial feelings toward you, and to say that, on his return to town, Satin Lodge will be one of the very first places at which he will call. In the mean time, I beg you will believe me, my dear sir, with the best compliments of myself and partners, yours most sincerely,

"Oily Gammon.

"Thomas Tag-rag, Esq."

"That, I think, will about do," quoth Gammon to himself, with a thoughtful air, as, having made an exact copy of the above letter, he sealed it up and directed it. He then came down-stairs to supper, having first sent the letter off to the post-office.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEREIN MR. AUBREY WITH ASTONISHING MAGNANIMITY SURRENDERS YATTON WITHOUT FURTHER CONTEST TO THE HERO

When, about seven o'clock on the morning after the delivery of the verdict which, if sustained, consigned them to beggary, the Aubreys met to partake of a slight and frugal breakfast before setting off for Yatton, the countenances of each bore the traces of great suffering, and also of the efforts made to conceal it. "The moment has arrived, dear Agnes and Kate," said her brother, "the moment has arrived that is to try what stuff we are made of. If we have any strength, this is the time to show it!"

"I'm sure I thought of you both almost all night long!" replied Miss Aubrey tremulously. "You have a lion's heart, dear Charles; and yet you are so gentle with us——"

"I should be a poor creature indeed, Kate, to give way just when I ought to play the man. Whenever our eyes do turn to the past, let it be with humble gratitude to God for having allowed us all, in this changing world, so long an interval of happiness; such, indeed, as falls to the lot of few. *What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*"

"My own Charles!" exclaimed Mrs. Aubrey, rising and throwing her arms round her husband, whose countenance was calm and serene, as was the tone of the sentiments he expressed solemn and elevated. Miss Aubrey was overcome with her stronger feelings, and buried her face in her handkerchief. Shortly afterward the carriage drew up, and also Dr. Tatham on horseback.

"Good morning! good morning, my friends," cried he, cheerfully, as he entered, holding forth both his hands; "you can't think how fresh and pleasant the air is! Did you sleep well? Come, come, ladies! On with your bonnets and shawls!"

Thus rattled on worthy little Dr. Tatham. The sight of Mrs. and Miss Aubrey, however, overcame his ill-assumed cheerfulness, his eyes were obstructed with tears, and he wrung the hand of Mr. Aubrey with convulsive energy. They soon set off at a rapid pace, Dr. Tatham riding along beside the carriage. Yatton was about twelve miles off. For the first few miles they preserved a tolerable show of cheerfulness; but as they perceived themselves nearing Yatton, it became plainly more and more of an effort for any of them to speak.

"O Charles, don't you dread to see Yatton?" said Miss Aubrey suddenly, as they turned a familiar corner of the road. Neither of them replied to her.

"When you come to the village," said Mr. Aubrey presently, to the postilion, "drive through it, right up to the hall, as quickly as you can." He was obeyed. As they passed through the village, with their windows up, none of them seemed disposed to look through, but leaned back in silence in their seats.

"God bless you! God bless you! I shall call in the evening," exclaimed Dr. Tatham; as, having reached the vicarage, he hastily waved his hand, and turned off. Soon they had passed the park gates; when had they entered before with such heavy hearts—with eyes so dreading to encounter every familiar object that met them? Alas! the spacious park was no longer theirs, not an inch of ground—nothing was theirs; the fine old turreted gateway seemed to tremble as they rattled under it.

"Courage, my sweet loves! Courage!" exclaimed Mr. Aubrey, grasping each of their hands, and then they burst into tears. Mr. Aubrey felt his own fortitude grievously shaken as he entered the old hall, no longer his *home*, and reflected, moreover—bitterest thought of all—that he had been declared by the law to have been hitherto the wrongful occupant of it; that he must forthwith proceed to "set his house in order," and prepare for a dreadful reckoning with him whom the law had declared to be the true owner of Yatton.

Two very long consultations had been held at the Attorney-General's chambers, where Mr. Aubrey, greatly to the surprise of all, stated emphatically that he insisted on no ground of objection being taken against his opponent, except such

as was strictly just, equitable, honorable, and conscientious. Rather than defeat him on mere technicalities—rather than avail himself of mere positive rules of law, while the RIGHT, as between man and man, was substantially in favor of his opponent—Mr. Aubrey declared that he would lose fifty Yattons. He was perfectly aware of his precise position, in point of law, namely, that he was safe in the possession of the Yatton property (with the exception of the trifle which was occupied by Jolter and had been the object of the action just determined) till another action should have been brought directly seeking its recovery; and that by forcing his opponent to bring such action, he might put him to considerable risk of retaining his verdict, and thereby greatly harass him, and ward off, indefinitely, the evil day from himself. By these means he might possibly, also, secure favorable terms for the payment of the dreadful arrear of mesne profits, in which he stood indebted to his successor. To this effect he had received several intimations from Mr. Runnington, as upright and conscientious an adviser as was to be found in the profession. But Mr. Aubrey had decided upon his course; he had taken his ground, and intended to maintain it.

He would, on the morrow, instruct Mr. Runnington to write to his opponent's solicitors, informing them that within three weeks' time the estates at Yatton would be delivered up to their client, Mr. Titmouse. He would also direct his own private solicitor to arrange for the quickest possible disposal of his house in Grosvenor Street, and of his wines and his furniture, both there and at Yatton. He resolved, moreover, to take the necessary steps for vacating his seat in Parliament; and having determined on these arrangements, he felt the momentary relief and satisfaction of the seaman who has prepared his vessel for the approaching storm.

He felt, indeed, relieved for a while from a dreadful pressure.

"They are determined not to let the grass grow underneath their feet, Mr. Aubrey," said Mr. Runnington, who, the next morning, made his appearance at breakfast, pursuant to appointment; "within two hours' time of the court delivering judgment, yesterday afternoon, I received the following communication." He handed to Mr. Aubrey this letter:

"GENTLEMEN:

"The rule for a new trial herein having been this day discharged, and the unanimous judgment of the court delivered in favor of the claims to the Yatton estate of the lessor of the plaintiff in the present action, we shall feel obliged by an intimation from you, at your earliest possible convenience, of the course which your client may now think fit to adopt. You are, of course, aware that we are now in a situation to attack, successfully, the entire property at Yatton, at present in the possession of Mr. Aubrey; and that, had we thought fit, we might have sought and recovered it all in the action which has just been decided in favor of our client. It is now in our power materially to strengthen the evidence adduced at the late trial; and we beg to be informed whether it is your client's intention to put Mr. Titmouse to the enormous expense and the delay of a second trial, the issue of which cannot be doubtful; or, with the promptitude and candor which are to be expected from a gentleman of the station and character of your client, at once to yield to our client the substantial fruits of his verdict.

"As we understand your client to be in town, we trust you will forgive us for requesting you immediately to communicate with him, and at your earliest convenience enable us to announce the result to our client.—We are, gentlemen, your obedient servants,

"QUIRK, GAMMON & SNAP.

"Messrs. RUNNINGTON & Co."

"Well—I own I see nothing to find fault with in this letter," said Mr. Aubrey calmly.

"Rather quick work, tho—is it not, Mr. Aubrey?—within an hour or two after judgment pronounced in their favor."

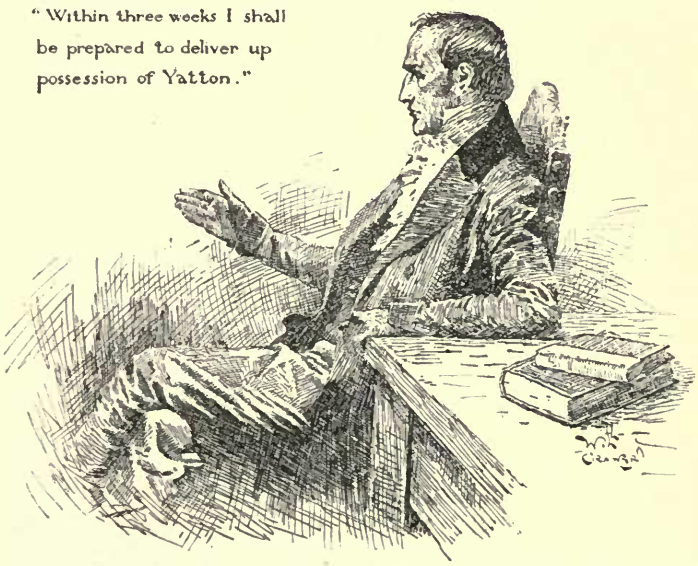
"I have made up my mind as to the course I shall adopt," said Mr. Aubrey.

"Oh, of course, that is quite clear!" said Mr. Runnington, pouring out his coffee—"we shall stand another shot, and see if there's ammunition enough left for the purpose: and we'll tender a bill of exceptions, and carry the case into the Exchequer chamber, and thence into the House of Lords—ah! we'll *work* them, I warrant them!" and he rubbed his hands, with a little excitement in his manner.

"Why, Mr. Runnington," answered Mr. Aubrey gravely, "would it not be wanton—most unconscientious—in me to put them to the expense and anxiety of a second trial, when the whole case, on both sides, has been fairly brought before both the court and the jury?"

"Good Heavens, Mr. Aubrey! who ever heard of an estate of ten-thousand-a-year being surrendered after one assault?"

"I have decided upon the course I shall adopt," replied Mr. Aubrey calmly and determinedly—"I shall instruct you to



"Within three weeks I shall be prepared to deliver up possession of Yatton."

write this day to the gentlemen upon the other side, and inform them that within three weeks I shall be prepared to deliver up possession of Yatton."

"My dear sir!—Do I hear aright? Deliver up possession of the estates? and within three weeks?"

"That was what I said, Mr. Runnington," replied Mr. Aubrey rather peremptorily.

"It is very painful for me to mention the subject, Mr. Aubrey; but have you adverted to the *mesne* profits?"

"I have. It is, indeed, a very fearful matter; and I frankly own that I see no way open before me, but to trust to the forbearance of——"

"Forbearance!—The *forbearance* of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon and Snap!! or of any one counseled by them!"

"Why, what can I do? I might as well undertake to pay off the national debt as the sum of sixty thousand pounds."

"That's just the very thing," replied Mr. Runnington.

"Whatever honorable negotiation can effect, I leave it in your hands to do. With reference to the time that may be obtained for the liquidation of it, I must own that this is a matter that has occasioned me inexpressible anxiety, Mr. Runnington. I do not see what length of time will enable me to discharge so fearful a sum of money, or even to make any sensible impression upon it. I am quite at their mercy."

"I am far from thinking it clear that equity would not interpose to relieve against *mesne* profits in such a case as the present—a dormant claim set up."

"I cannot see, Mr. Runnington, on what principle such an interference could be supported."

"No more do I, at present," replied Mr. Runnington, "but I'll lose no time in having the best advice on the subject."

The result of a consultation between Mr. Runnington and his partners, held on the day after his last interview with Mr. Aubrey, was the following letter, addressed to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon and Snap:

"GENTLEMEN:

"In answer to your letter of yesterday (the 25th inst.), we beg to inform you that, after the judgment in this cause pronounced yesterday in the Court of King's Bench, our client, Mr. Aubrey, does not intend to resist the claim of Mr. Titmouse to the residue of the Yatton property. We now, therefore, beg to give you notice that on the 17th of next month you will be at liberty, on behalf of your client, Mr. Titmouse, to take possession of all the property at Yatton, at present in the possession of Mr. Aubrey. The whole of the last quarter's rents, due at Lady-day, have been paid into the bank of Messrs. Harley, at Grilston, and will, on the 17th of May, be placed at the disposal of your client.

"We are also instructed to request the delivery of your bill

at as early a period as may suit your convenience, with a view to its immediate examination and settlement.

"We cannot forbear adding, while thus implicitly following the instructions of our client, our very great surprise and regret at the course which he has thought fit to adopt; since we have the strongest reasons for believing that, had he been disposed to contest your client's claim further, in accordance with advice received from a high quarter, his case would have been materially strengthened and your difficulties greatly increased. We feel confident that the magnanimity displayed by our client will be duly appreciated by yours.

"P. S.—As to the *mesne profits*, by the way, of course we anticipate no difficulty in effecting an amicable arrangement satisfactory to both parties, due consideration being had for the critical position in which our client finds himself so suddenly and unexpectedly placed. Indeed, it is not difficult to conceive that Mr. Aubrey, in taking the step of which we have above advised you, must have contemplated being met in a similar frank, liberal and equitable spirit."

"Lord, Gammon! isn't it glorious?" quoth Mr. Quirk, heatedly, rubbing his hands together; "give us your hand, Gammon! We've fought a precious hard battle together——"

"We've put an ape into possession of Paradise—that's all," said Gammon, absently and half aloud, and bitterly and contemptuously.

"By the way, Gammon, you see what's said about our bill —eh? The sooner it's made out the better, I should say—and—ahem! hem!—while Mr. Aubrey's on the tight rope he won't think of looking down at the particular items, will he? I should say, now's our time, and strike while the iron's hot!"

"You must not *overdo* it, Mr. Quirk—but all that I leave, as usual, to your admirable management as to that of a first-rate man of business. You know I'm a sad hand at accounts; but you and Snap are—you'll do all that should be done."

"Ay, ay—trust us!" interrupted Quirk quickly. "And, by the way, there are the mesne profits. Off hand, I should say we ought to be content with—say—twenty thousand down,

and the rest in two years' time, so as to give him time to look about him a little——"

"That will be quite an after-consideration," said Mr. Gammon, who, for the last few minutes, had appeared lost in thought.

"Egad—an *after*-consideration? Hang me if *I* think so, Gammon! There's a certain *bond*—eh? you recollect——"

"I assure you, Mr. Quirk, that my eye is fixed quite as

"We've put an ape into possession of paradise—that's all" said Gammon

steadily and anxiously on that point as yours," said Gammon gravely.

"Thank you—thank you, Gammon!" replied Quirk with rather a relieved air—"it couldn't possibly be in better hands. Lud—to go wrong *there!* It would send me to my grave at a hand gallop. I take it we've a lien on the rents in the banker's hands, and on those which become due next quarter-day, and on the first instalment of the mesne profits, both for our bill of costs and in respect of that same bond?"

"Mesne profits, Mr. Quirk?" echoed Gammon, rather quickly; "you seem to take it for granted that they are all ready to be paid over! Even supposing Titmouse not to grow restive, do you suppose it probable that Mr. Aubrey, after so vast and sudden a sacrifice, can have more than a very few thousands to keep him from immediate want, since we have reason to believe he has got no other resources than Yatton?"

"Not got 'em—not got 'em? D—n him! then he must look sharp and *get* 'em, that's all! You know we can't be trifled with; we must look after the interests of—Titmouse."

"Ah, you're for putting the thumb-screws on at once—eh?" inquired Gammon with a strange smile.

"Ay, that's *just* what I meant," quoth Quirk.

"Heartless old scoundrel!" thought Gammon, almost expressing as much; but his momentary excitement passed off unobserved by Mr. Quirk. "And, I must say, I agree with you," he added; "we ought in justice to see you first reimbursed your very heavy outlays, Mr. Quirk."

"Well, that's honorable.—O Gammon, how I *wish* you would let me make a friend of you!" suddenly added Mr. Quirk, eying wistfully his surprised companion. .

"If you have one sincere, disinterested friend in the world, Mr. Quirk, he is to be found in Oily Gammon," said that gentleman warmly, perceiving that Mr. Quirk was laboring with some communication of which he wished to deliver himself.

"I may be wrong, Gammon," commenced Mr. Quirk, in a low tone; "but I do believe you've always felt a kind of personal friendship toward me; and there ought to be no secrets among friends. *Friends*, indeed? Perhaps it's premature to mention so small a matter; but at a certain silversmith's, not a thousand miles from the Strand, there's at this moment in hand, as a present from me to you—" [Oh, dear, dear! Mr. Quirk! what a shocking untruth! and at your advanced period of life, too!]—"as elegant a gold snuff-box as can be made, with a small inscription on the lid. I hope you won't value it the less for its being the gift of old Caleb Quirk——" He paused and looked earnestly at Mr. Gammon.

"My dear Mr. Quirk, you have taken me," said he apparently with great emotion, "quite by surprise. Value it? I

will preserve it to the latest moment of my life, as a memorial of one whom the more I know of him, the more I respect and admire!"

"You, Gammon, are in your prime—scarce even that—but I am growing old——" Tears appeared to glisten in the old gentleman's eyes; Gammon, much moved, shook him cordially by the hand in silence, wondering what upon earth was coming next. "Yes; old Caleb Quirk's day is drawing to a close—I feel it, Gammon, I feel it! But I shall leave behind me—a—a—child—an only daughter, Gammon—" that gentleman gazed at the speaker with an expression of respectful sympathy—"Dora! I don't think you can have known Dora so long, Gammon, without feeling a *leetle* interest in her!" Here Gammon's color mounted rapidly, and he looked with feelings of a novel description at his senior partner. Could it be possible that old Quirk wished to bring about a match between his daughter and Gammon? His thoughts were for a moment confused. All he could do was to bow with an earnest—an anxious—a deprecating air; and Mr. Quirk, rather hurriedly, proceeded: "And when I assure you, Gammon, that it is in your power to make an old friend and his only daughter happy and proud—" Gammon began to draw very long breaths, and to look more and more apprehensively at his senior partner—"in short, my dear friend Gammon, let me out with it at once—my daughter's in love with Titmouse."

"Ah, my dear Mr. Quirk, is that all?" he exclaimed, and shook Mr. Quirk cordially by the hand—"at length you have made a friend of me, indeed. But, to tell you the truth, I have long suspected as much: I have, indeed!"

"Have you really? Well! there *is* no accounting for tastes, is there—especially among the women? Poor Dora's over head and ears—quite!—she is, so help me Heaven!"

"Well, my dear sir, and why this surprise?" said Gammon earnestly. "I consider Titmouse to be a very handsome young fellow; and that he is already rapidly acquiring very gentlemanly manners; and as to his *fortune*—really, it would be most desirable to bring it about. Indeed, the sooner his heart's fixed and his word's pledged, the better—for there will be many schemers on the look-out to entrap his frank and inexperienced nature—look, for instance, at Tag-rag."

"Eugh!" exclaimed Mr. Quirk, with a sudden motion of sickening disgust, "the old beast!"

"You see," said Gammon, "we've a very delicate and difficult game to play with old Tag-rag. He's certainly a toad, ugly and venomous—but then, he's got a jewel in his head—he's got money, you know, and, to serve *our* purposes, we must really give him some hopes about his daughter and Titmouse."

"Faugh! the little trollop! It makes one sick to hear of her! And, by the way, now we're on that subject, Gammon, what do we want of this wretch Tag-rag, now that Titmouse has actually got the property?"

"Want of him? Money—security, my dear sir!—money! My opinion is, that we should get *some third party* or parties to advance any required sum, and prevail upon Tag-rag to join in a collateral security, without—if possible—making him aware of the extent of liability he is incurring. By exciting him with the ridiculous notion of an attachment between his daughter and Titmouse, he may be induced to give his signature, as to some complimentary matter of form only. —Now, that's my opinion, Mr. Quirk; not lightly or hastily formed; and it rests upon a deep feeling of personal regard toward you, and also our common interests."

"Y-e-e-s," said the old man meditatively. "I don't quite understand, but I dare say you are right. Well, we can talk over these matters at another time. Gad, Gammon, you can't think how it's relieved me, to open my mind to you on this matter! We quite understand one another now, Gammon—eh?"

"Quite," replied Gammon pointedly; and Mr. Quirk having quitted the room, the former prepared to reply to Messrs. Runnington's letter.

This was the answer he concocted:

"We are favored with your letter of this day's date, and beg to assure you how very highly we appreciate the prompt and honorable course which has been taken by your client, under circumstances calculated to excite the greatest possible commiseration. Every expression of respectful sympathy, on our parts and on that of our client, Mr. Titmouse, which you may think fit to convey to your distinguished client, is his.

"We shall be prepared to receive possession of the Yatton estates on the day you mention—namely, the 17th May next, on behalf of our client, Mr. Titmouse; on whose behalf, also, we beg to thank you for your communication concerning the last quarter's rents.

"With reference to the question of the mesne profits, we cannot doubt that your client will promptly pursue the same line of honorable conduct which he has hitherto adopted, and we sincerely trust that a good understanding in this matter will speedily exist between our respective clients.

"As you have intimated a wish upon the subject, we beg to inform you that we have given instructions for making out and delivering our bill herein."

Having finished writing the above letter, Gammon sat back in his chair, with folded arms, and entered upon a long train of thought—revolving many matters which were worthy of the profound consideration they then received. For one thing he had resolved that Miss Quirk should never become Mrs. Titmouse.

CHAPTER XV

INTRODUCES THE HERO TO THE FAVORABLE NOTICE OF A CERTAIN NOBLE CONNECTION OF HIS FAMILY

PENDING the rule for the new trial, Mr. Quirk greatly increased the allowance of Titmouse; to an extent, indeed, which admitted of his entering into almost all the gayeties that his heart could desire. In the first place, he constantly added to his wardrobe. Then he took lessons, every other day, in "the noble art of self-defense"; which gave him an opportunity of forming, with great ease, a circle of acquaintance at once extensive and brilliant. Fencing-rooms, wrestling-rooms, shooting-galleries, places for pigeon-shooting and cock-fighting, the water and boat-racing—these were the dazzling scenes which occupied the chief portion of each day. Then, in the evenings, there were theaters, great and small, the various taverns and other places of nocturnal resort which are the secret pride and glory of the metropolis. In addition to this, at an advanced period of the night, or rather a very early hour in the morning, he sedulously strove to perfect himself in those higher arts and accomplishments, excelled in by one or two of the more eminent of the youthful aristocracy, viz., breaking windows, pulling bells, wrenching off knockers, extinguishing lamps, tripping up old women, watchmen and children, and spoiling their clothes. Ah, Titmouse, Titmouse! Now is your time! *Macte norâ virtute, puer!*

This is a brief and general account of the way in which Titmouse passed his time, and laid the groundwork of that extensive acquaintance with men and things which was requisite to enable him to occupy with dignity the splendid station to which he was on the point of being elevated.

But let us not lose sight of our early and interesting friends, the Tag-rags—a thing which both Quirk and Gammon resolved should not happen to Titmouse; for, on the very

first Sunday after his arrival in town from York, a handsome glass coach might have been seen, about two o'clock in the afternoon, drawing up opposite the gates of Satin Lodge; from which descended Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Titmouse. Now, the Tag-rags always dined at about two o'clock on Sundays; and, on the present occasion, Mr., Mrs., and Miss Tag-rag, together with a pretty constant visitor, the Reverend Dismal Horror, were sitting at their dinner-table.

"O ma!" exclaimed Miss Tag-rag faintly, changing color as she caught sight, through the blinds, of the approaching visitors, "if there isn't Mr. Titmouse!" and almost dropping on the table her plate, in which, with an air of tender gallantry, Mr. Horror was in the act of depositing some greens, she flew out of the room, darted up-stairs, and in a trice was standing, with beating heart, before her glass, hastily twirling her ringlets round her trembling fingers and making one or two slight alterations in her dress. Her papa and mamma started up at the same moment, hastily wiping their mouths on the corners of the table-cloth, and, after a hurried apology to their reverend guest, whom they begged "to go on eating till they came back," they bounced into the drawing-room, with just time enough to appear as if they had been seated for some time.

"Ah! Mr. and Mrs. Tag-rag! 'Pon my soul—glad to see you—and—hope you're all well?" commenced Titmouse, with an air of easy confidence and grace. Mr. Gammon calmly introduced himself and Mr. Quirk.

"We were just going to sit down to—*lunch*," said Mr. Tag-rag hurriedly.

"You won't take a little, will you, gentlemen?" inquired Mrs. Tag-rag faintly; and both the worthy couple felt infinite relief on being assured that their distinguished visitors had already lunched. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Tag-rag could take their eyes off Mr. Titmouse, whose easy nonchalance convinced them that he must have been keeping the society of lords. He was just inquiring—as he ran his hand through his hair, and gently smacked his slight ebony cane against his leg—after Miss Tag-rag, when, pale and agitated, that interesting young lady entered.

Titmouse rose and received her in a familiar, forward manner. She looked such a shriveled, little, ugly, formal creature

that Titmouse conceived quite a hatred of her, through recollecting that he had once thought such an inferior piece of goods superfine. After a little further conversation, principally concerning the brilliant success of Titmouse, Mr. Quirk came to the business of the day, and invited Mr., Mrs., and Miss Tag-rag to dinner at Alibi House, on the ensuing Sunday, at six o'clock—apologizing for the absence of Miss Quirk on the score of indisposition. The invitation was accepted in a very obsequious manner; and soon afterward their great visitors took their departure, leaving the Tag-rags in a state of considerable excitement.

The memorable Sunday at length arrived, and precisely at six o'clock a genteel fly deposited the visitants from Satin Lodge at the splendid entrance to Alibi House. There was the big footman—shoulder-knot, red breeches, and all. Tag-rag felt a *little* nervous. Before they had entered the gates, the fond proud parents had kissed their trembling daughter, and entreated her "to keep her spirits up!" The exhortation was needful; for when she saw the sort of style that awaited them, she became not a little agitated. When she entered the hall—ah! on a chair lay a glossy new hat and a delicate ebony walking-stick; so he had come—was then up-stairs!—Miss Tag-rag trembled in every limb.

"I don't know, my dear," whispered Mrs. Tag-rag to her husband, with a subdued sigh, as they followed the splendid footman up-stairs—"it may be all uncommon grand; but somehow I'm afraid we're doing wrong—it's the Lord's day—see if any good comes of it."

"Tut—hold your tongue! Let's have no nonsense," sternly whispered Mr. Tag-rag to his submissive wife.

"Your name, sir?" quoth the footman, in a gentlemanly way.

"Mr., Mrs., and Miss Tag-rag," replied Mr. Tag-rag, after clearing his throat; and so they were announced, Miss Quirk coming forward to receive the ladies with the most charming affability. There stood Titmouse, in an easy attitude, with his hands stuck into his coat pockets and resting on his hips, in a very delicate and elegant fashion. How completely he seemed at his ease!

"O Lord!" thought Tag-rag, "that's the young fellow I used to go on so to!"

In due time dinner was announced; and who can describe the rapture that thrilled through the bosoms of the three Tag-rags, when Mr. Quirk requested Mr. Titmouse to take down—Miss Tag-rag! Her father took down Mrs. Alias; Mr. Quirk, Mrs. Tag-rag; and Gammon, Miss Quirk, who really might have been proud of her partner. Gammon was about thirty-six years old; above the average height; with a particularly gentlemanly appearance and address, and an intellectual and even handsome countenance, tho occasionally it bore, to a keen observer, a sinister expression. He wore a blue coat, a plain white waistcoat, black trousers, and silk stockings. There was at once an appearance of neatness and carelessness; and there was such a ready smile—such bland ease and self-possession about him—as communicated itself to those whom he addressed.

Dinner went off very pleasantly, the wines soon communicating a little confidence to the flustered guests. Mrs. Tag-rag had drunk so much champagne—an unusual beverage for her—that almost as soon as she had returned to the drawing-room she sat down on the sofa and fell asleep, leaving the two young ladies to amuse each other as best they might; for Mrs. Alias was very deaf, and, moreover, very stiff and distant, and sat looking at them in silence.

At length the four gentlemen repaired to the drawing-room, whence issued the sounds of music; and on entering they beheld the two lovely performers seated at the piano, engaged upon a duet. The plump flaxen-haired Miss Quirk, in her flowing white muslin dress, her thick gold chain and massive bracelets, formed rather a strong contrast to her sallow, skinny little companion, in a span-new slate-colored silk dress with staring scarlet sash, her long corkscrew ringlets glistening in bear's grease. As soon as the gentlemen made their appearance the ladies ceased and withdrew from the piano, Miss Tag-rag, with a sweet air of simplicity and conscious embarrassment, gliding toward the sofa, where sat her mamma asleep, but whom she at once awoke. Mr. Quirk exclaimed, as, evidently elevated with wine, he slapped his daughter on her fat back, "Ah, Dora, my dove!" while Tag-rag kissed his daughter's cheek and squeezed her hand and then glanced with a proud and delighted air at Titmouse, who was lolling at full length upon the other sofa, picking his teeth.

While Miss Quirk was making tea, Gammon gayly conversing with her and in an undertone satirizing Miss Tag-rag, the latter young lady was gazing, with a timid air, at a large and splendidly bound volume—in fact, Miss Quirk's

Poor Miss Tag-rag almost dropped the magnificent volume.

album; and, after turning over most of the leaves and glancing over the "poetical effusions" and "prose sentiments" which few fools can abstain from depositing upon the embossed pages when solicited by the lovely proprietresses of

such works, behold—her heart fluttered—poor Miss Tag-rag almost dropped the magnificent volume; for there was the idolized name of Mr. Titmouse—no doubt his own handwriting and composition. She read it over eagerly again and again:

"Tittlebat Titmouse is My name.
England is My Nation.
London Is My dwelling-Place.
And Christ Is My Salvation."

It was very—very beautiful—beautiful in its simplicity! She looked anxiously about for writing implements! but not seeing any, was at length obliged to trust to her memory: on which, indeed, the exquisite composition was already inscribed in indelible characters. Miss Quirk, who was watching her motions, guessed the true cause of her excitement; and a smile of mingled scorn and pity for her infatuated delusion shone upon her face; in which, however, there appeared a little anxiety when she beheld Titmouse—not, however, perceiving that he did so in consequence of a motion from Gammon, whose eye governed his movements as a man's those of his spaniel—walk up to her and converse with a great appearance of interest. At length Mr. Tag-rag's "carriage" was announced. Mr. Quirk gave his arm to Mrs. Tag-rag, and Mr. Titmouse to the daughter; who endeavored, as she went down the stairs, to direct melting glances at her handsome and distinguished companion. They evidently *told*, for she could not be mistaken; he certainly once or twice squeezed her arm—and the last fond words he uttered to her were: "'Pon my soul—it's early: devilish sorry you're going!"

As the Tag-rags drove home, they were all loud in the praises of those whom they had just quitted, particularly of those whose splendid hospitality they had been enjoying. With a daughter, with whom Mr. Quirk must naturally have wished to make so splendid a match as that with Titmouse—but who was plainly engaged to Mr. Gammon—how kind and disinterested was Mr. Quirk, in affording every encouragement in his power to the passion which Titmouse had so manifestly conceived for Miss Tag-rag! And was there ever so delightful a person as Gammon? How cordially he had

shaken the hands of each of them at parting! As for Miss Tag-rag, she almost felt that, if her heart had not been so deeply engaged to Titmouse, she could have loved Mr. Gammon!

"I hope, Tabby," said Mrs. Tag-rag, "that when you're Mrs. Titmouse, you'll bring your dear husband to hear Mr. Horror. You know, we ought to be grateful to the Lord—for He has done it."

"La, ma, how can I tell?" quoth Miss Tag-rag petulantly. "I must go where Mr. Titmouse chooses, of course; and no doubt he'll take sittings in one of the West End churches: you know, *you* go where pa goes—I go where Titmouse goes! But I will come sometimes, too—if it's only to show that I'm not above it, you know. La, what a stir there will be! The three Miss Knipps—I do hope they'll be there! I'll have your pew, ma, lined with red velvet; it will look so genteel."

"I'm not quite so sure, Tabby, tho," interrupted her father with a certain swell of manner, "that we shall, after a certain event, continue to live in these parts. There's such a thing as retiring from business, Tabby; besides, we shall nat'rally wish to be near you."

"He's a *love* of a man, pa, isn't he?" interrupted Miss Tag-rag, with irrepressible excitement, as her father folded her in his arms.

While the brilliant success of Tittlebat Titmouse was exciting so great a sensation among the inmates of Satin Lodge and Alibi House, there were also certain quarters in the upper regions of society in which it was contemplated with feelings of intense interest.

If the reader had reverently cast his eye over the pages of *Debrett's Peerage*, his attention could not have failed to be riveted, among a galaxy of brilliant but minor stars, by the radiance of one transcendent constellation:

"Augustus Mortimer Plantagenet Fitz-Urse, Earl of Dreddlington, Viscount Fitz-Urse, and Baron Drelincourt; Knight of the Golden Fleece; G.C.B., D.C.L., F.C.S., F.P.S., etc., etc., etc.; Lieutenant-General in the army, Colonel of the 37th regiment of light dragoons; Lord Lieutenant of ——shire; elder brother of the Trinity House; for-

merly Lord Steward of the Household; born the 31st March, 17—; succeeded his father, PERCY CONSTANTINE FITZ-URSE, as fifth Earl, and twentieth in the Barony, January 10th, 17—; married, April 1, 18—, the Right Hon. Lady Philippa Emmeline Blanche Macspleuchan, daughter of Archibald, ninth Duke of Tantallon, K.T., and has issue an only child,

"CECILIA PHILIPPA LEOPOLDINA PLANTAGENET, born June 10, 18—.

"Town residence, Grosvenor Square.

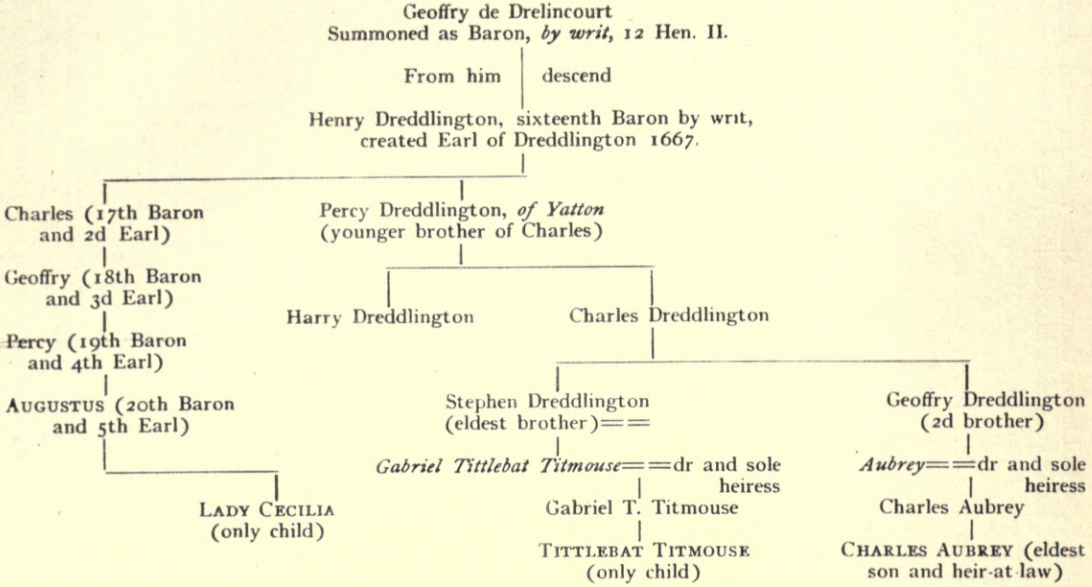
"Seat, Poppleton Hall, Hertfordshire.

"Earldom, by patent, 1667; —— Barony, by writ of summons, 12th Hen. II."

The reader may by this time have got an intimation that Tittlebat Titmouse, in a madder freak of fortune than any which her ladyship hath hitherto exhibited, is far on his way toward a dizzy pitch of greatness—viz. that he has now become heir-expectant to the oldest barony in the kingdom—between it and him only one old peer, and his sole child, an unmarried daughter, intervening. Behold the thing demonstrated to your very eye, in the pedigree on the next page, which is only our former one a little extended.

From this it will appear that on the death of Augustus, fifth earl and twentieth baron, with no other issue than Lady Cecilia, the earldom being then extinct, the barony would descend upon the Lady Cecilia; and that, in the event of her dying without issue in the lifetime of her father, Tittlebat Titmouse would, on the earl's death without other lawful issue, become LORD DRELINCOURT, twenty-*first* in the barony; and in the event of her dying without issue, after her father's death, TITTLEBAT TITMOUSE would become the twenty-*second* LORD DRELINCOURT; one or other of which two splendid positions, but for the enterprising agency of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, would have been occupied by CHARLES AUBREY.

The Earl of Dreddlington was about sixty-seven years old; and he would have realized the idea of an incarnation of the sublimest PRIDE. He was of rather a slight make, and, tho of a tolerably advanced age, stood as straight as an arrow. His hair was glossy and white as snow; his features were of an aristocratic cast; their expression was severe and haughty; and I am compelled to say that there was scarce a trace of


Geoffry de Drelincourt
Summoned as Baron, by writ, 12 Hen. II.
From him descend
Henry Dreddlington, sixteenth Baron by writ, created Earl of Dreddlington 1667.
Charles (17th Baron and 2d Earl)
Geoffry (18th Baron and 3d Earl)
Percy (19th Baron and 4th Earl)
Augustus (20th Baron and 5th Earl)
Lady Cecilia (only child)
Percy Dreddlington, of Yatton (younger brother of Charles)
Harry Dreddlington
Charles Dreddlington
Stephen Dreddlington (eldest brother)
Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse
dr and sole heiress
Gabriel T. Titmouse
Tittlebat Titmouse (only child)
Geoffry Dreddlington (2d brother)
Aubrey
dr and sole heiress
Charles Aubrey
Charles Aubrey (eldest son and heir-at-law)

intellect perceptible in them. His manner and demeanor were cold, imperturbable, inaccessible; wherever he went—so to speak—he radiated cold. With what calm and supreme self-satisfaction did he look down upon all lower in the peerage than himself! If any one could have ventured upon a *post-mortem* examination of so august a structure as the Earl's carcass, his heart would probably have been found to be the size of a pea, and his brain soft and flabby; both, however, equal to the small occasions which, from time to time, called for the exercise of their functions. The former was occupied almost exclusively by two feelings—love of himself and of his daughter, the latter exhibited its powers in mastering the military details requisite for nominal soldiership; the game of whist; the routine of petty business in the House of Lords; and the etiquette of the court.

One branch of useful knowledge, by the way, he had, however, completely mastered—that which is so ably condensed in *Debrett;* and he became a sort of oracle in such matters. As for his politics, he professed Whig principles—and was, indeed, a bitter tho quiet partisan. In attendance to his senatorial duties he practised an exemplary punctuality; was always to be found in the House at its sitting and rising, and never once, on any occasion great or small, voted against his party. He had never been heard to speak in a full House; first, because he never could muster nerve enough for the purpose; secondly, because he never had anything to say; and lastly, lest he should compromise his dignity, and destroy the *prestige* of his position, by not speaking better than any one present. His services were not, however, entirely overlooked; for, on his party coming into office for a few weeks (they knew it could be for no longer a time), they made him Lord Steward of the Household; which was thenceforward an epoch to which he referred every event of his life, great and small. The great object of his ambition was to obtain a step in the peerage—a MARQUISATE—at which the Earl gazed with the wistful eye of an old and feeble ape looking at a coconut just above his reach.

Such is an outline of the character of this great and good man, the Earl of Dreddlington. As for his domestic and family circumstances, he had been a widower for some fifteen years, his countess having brought him but one child, Lady

Cecilia Philippa Leopoldina Plantagenet, who was, in almost all respects, the counterpart of her illustrious father. She resembled him not a little in feature, only that she partook of the plainness of her mother. Her complexion was delicately fair; but her features had no other expression than that of a languid hauteur. Her upper eyelids drooped as if she could hardly keep them open; the upper jaw projected considerably over the under one; and her front teeth were prominent and exposed. Frigid and inanimate, she seemed to take but little interest in anything on earth. In person she was of average height, of slender and well-proportioned figure and an erect and graceful carriage, only that she had a habit of throwing her head a little backward, that gave her a singularly disdainful appearance. Tho she would be the possessor of a barony in her own right and £5,000 a year, she had reached her twenty-seventh year without having had an eligible offer of marriage; a circumstance which, it may be believed, not a little embittered her. She inherited her father's pride in all its plenitude.

Ever since the first Earl of Dreddlington had, through a bitter pique conceived against his eldest son, the second earl, diverted the principal family revenues to the younger branch, leaving the title to be supported by only £5,000 a year, there had been a complete estrangement between the elder and the younger branches of the family. On Mr. Aubrey's attaining his majority, however, the present earl sanctioned the making of overtures toward a reconciliation, being of opinion that Mr. Aubrey and Lady Cecilia might, by intermarriage, effect a happy reunion of family interests. Actuated by such considerations, he had done more to conciliate Mr. Aubrey than he had ever done toward any one on earth. It was, however, in vain. Aubrey not only declined to marry his cousin, but clenched his refusal, and sealed his final exclusion from the dawning good opinion and affections of the earl, by marrying some one else. Thenceforth there was a great gulf between the Earl of Dreddlington and the Aubreys.

Such being the relative position of Mr. Aubrey and the Earl of Dreddlington, it is easy to imagine the lively interest with which the earl first heard of the tidings that a stranger had set up a title to the whole of the Yatton estates; and the silent but profound anxiety with which he continued to re-

gard the progress of the affair. He obtained, by means of confidential inquiries instituted by his solicitor, a general notion of the nature of the new claimant's pretensions; but, with a due regard of delicacy toward his unfortunate kinsman, he studiously concealed the interest he felt in so important a family question as the succession to the Yatton property. The earl and his daughter were exceedingly anxious to *see* the claimant; and when he heard that that claimant was a gentleman of "decided Whig principles"—the earl was very near setting it down as a sort of special interference of Providence in his favor; and one that, in the natural order of things, would lead to the accomplishment of the other wishes of the earl. When he learned the result of the trial on his return to London, he decided that the time had at length arrived for him to take decisive steps; nay, duty to his newly discovered kinsman required it.

Messrs. Titmouse and Gammon were walking arm in arm down Oxford Street, on their return from some livery-stables, where they had been looking at a horse which Titmouse was thinking of purchasing, when an incident occurred which ruffled him not a little. He had been recognized and publicly accosted by a vulgar fellow with a yard-measure in his hand and a large parcel of drapery under his arm; in fact, by our old friend Mr. Huckaback. In vain did Mr. Titmouse affect, for some time, not to see his old acquaintance, and to be earnestly engaged in conversation with Mr. Gammon.

"Ah, Titty!—Titmouse! Well, *Mister* Titmouse—how are you?—Devilish long time since we met!" Titmouse directed a look at him which he wished could have blighted him, and quickened his pace without taking any further notice of the presumptuous intruder. Huckaback's blood was up, however, —roused by this ungrateful and insolent treatment from one who had been under such great obligations to him; and quickening his pace also, he kept alongside with Titmouse.

"Ah," continued Huckaback, "why do you cut me in this way, Titty? You *aren't* ashamed of me, surely? Many's the time you've tramped up and down Oxford Street with your bundle and yard-measure——"

"Fellow!" at length exclaimed Titmouse indignantly. "'Pon my life I'll give you in charge if you go on so! Be off, you low fellow!—Dem vulgar brute!" he subjoined in a lower tone,

bursting into perspiration, for he had not forgotten the insolent pertinacity of Huckaback's disposition.

"My eyes! Give me in charge? Come, I like that, rather —you vagabond! Pay me what you owe me! You're a swindler! You owe me fifty pounds, you do! You sent a man to rob me!"

"Will any one get a constable?" inquired Titmouse, who had grown as white as death.

Gammon's interference was in vain. Huckaback got more abusive and noisy; no constable was at hand; so, to escape the intolerable interruption and nuisance, he beckoned a coach; and Titmouse and he were soon out of sight and hearing of Mr. Huckaback. As they approached the hotel, they observed a yellow chariot rolling away from the door.

"I wonder who that is," said Gammon; "it's an earl's coronet on the panel; and a white-haired old gentleman was sitting low down in the corner——"

"Ah—it's no doubt a fine thing to be a lord, and all that —but I'll answer for it, some of 'em's as poor as a church-mouse," replied Titmouse as they entered the hotel. At that moment the waiter presented him with a letter and a card, which had only the moment before been left for him. The card ran thus:

THE EARL OF DREDDLINGTON.

GROSVENOR SQUARE.

and there was written on it, in pencil, in rather a feeble and hurried character—"For Mr. Titmouse."

"My stars, Mr. Gammon!" exclaimed Mr. Titmouse excitedly, addressing Mr. Gammon, who also seemed greatly interested by the occurrence. They both repaired to a vacant table at the extremity of the room; and Titmouse, with not a little trepidation, opened the ample envelope, and read as follows:

"The Earl of Dreddlington has the honor of waiting upon Mr. Titmouse, in whom he is very happy to have, tho unexpectedly, discovered so near a kinsman. On the event which has brought this to pass, the Earl congratulates himself not

less than Mr. Titmouse, and hopes for the earliest opportunity of a personal introduction.

"The Earl leaves town to-day, and will not return till Monday next, on which day he begs the favor of Mr. Titmouse's company to dinner at six o'clock. He may depend upon its being strictly a family *reunion;* the only person present, besides Mr. Titmouse and the Earl, being the Lady Cecilia.

"Grosvenor Square, Thursday."

As soon as Titmouse had read the above, still holding it in his hand, he gazed at Gammon with mute apprehension and delight; but Gammon, after reading over the note once or twice, seemed not much inclined for conversation; and, had Titmouse been accustomed to observation, he might have gathered that that gentleman's mind was very deeply occupied by some matter or other, probably suggested by the incident which had just taken place. Titmouse called for pens, ink, and paper, and prepared to reply to Lord Dreddlington's note. Gammon, however, who knew the peculiarities of his friend's style of correspondence, suggested that *he* should draw up the note which was to be sent to Lord Dreddlington. Here it is:

"Mr. Titmouse begs to present his compliments to the Earl of Dreddlington, and to express the high sense he entertains of the kind consideration evinced by his Lordship in his call and note of to-day.

"One of the most gratifying circumstances connected with Mr. Titmouse's recent success is the distinguished alliance which his Lordship has been so prompt and courteous in recognizing. Mr. Titmouse will feel the greatest pleasure in availing himself of the Earl of Dreddlington's invitation to dinner for Monday next."

"Have you a 'Peerage' here, waiter?" inquired Gammon, as the waiter brought him a lighted taper. *Debrett* was shortly laid before him; and turning to the name of Dreddlington, he read over what has been already laid before the reader. "Humph—'*Lady Cecilia*'—here she is—his *daughter*—I thought as much—I see!" This was what passed through his mind, as—having left Titmouse, who set off to deposit

a card and the above "answer" at Lord Dreddlington's—he made his way toward the delectable regions in which their office was situated—Saffron Hill. "'Tis curious—amusing—interesting, to observe his progress—" continued Gammon to himself—

TAG-RAG — and his daughter.
QUIRK — and his daughter.
THE EARL of DREDLINGTON and his daughter —"

"*Tag-rag*—and his daughter;
"*Quirk*—and his daughter;
"*The Earl of Dreddlington*—and his daughter. How many more? Happy! happy! happy Titmouse!"

CHAPTER XVI

TELLS HOW THE HERO DINES WITH THE AUGUST EARL OF DREDDLINGTON AND HIS DAUGHTER, THE GRACIOUS LADY CECILIA; AND DESCRIBES THE VARIOUS ADVENTURES WHICH BEFALL HIM ON THIS MOMENTOUS OCCASION

TITMOUSE's dinner engagement with the Earl of Dreddlington, his august and awful kinsman, was an event of such magnitude as to absorb almost all his faculties in the contemplation of it, and also to cause him great anxiety in preparing for an effective appearance upon so signal an occasion. Mr. Gammon had repeatedly instructed his anxious pupil as to the manner in which he ought to behave. He was—Heaven save the mark, poor Titmouse!—to assume an air of mingled deference, self-possession, and firmness; not to be overawed by the greatness with which he would be brought into contact, nor unduly elated by a sense of his own suddenly acquired importance. He was, on the other hand, to steer evenly between the extremes of timorousness and temerity—Titmouse was to remember that, great as was the Earl of Dreddlington, he was yet *but a man*—related, too, by consanguinity, to him, the aforesaid Titmouse, who might, moreover, before many years should have elapsed, become himself Earl of Dreddlington, or at least Lord Drelincourt. At the same time the Earl's advanced years gave him a natural claim to the respect and deference of his young kinsman, Titmouse might derive consolation from the reflection that his income probably *exceeded* by a third that of the Earl of Dreddlington.

This is the sum of Mr. Gammon's *general* instructions to his eager and excited pupil; but he also gave Titmouse many minor hints and suggestions. He was to drink very little wine—(whereat Titmouse demurred somewhat vehemently, and asked "How the d—l he was to *get his steam up*?")

—and on no account to call for beer or porter, to which plebeian beverages, indeed, he might consider himself as having bid a long and last adieu;—to say "my Lord" and "your Lordship" in addressing the Earl—and "your Ladyship" in addressing Lady Cecilia;—and, above all, he was never to appear in a hurry, but do and say whatever he had to do and say calmly; for the nerves of the aristocracy were very delicate, and could not bear a bustle or the slightest display of energy or feeling. Then, as to his *dress*—Gammon, feeling himself treading on very doubtful ground, intimated merely that the essence of true fashion was *simplicity*—but here Titmouse grew fidgety, and his Mentor ceased.

During the night which ushered in the eventful day, our friend got but very little sleep. Early in the morning he engaged a most respectable glass-coach to convey him westward in something like style; and before noon, his anxieties were set at rest by the punctual arrival of various articles of dress and decoration and scent—for Titmouse had a great idea of scents. As for his new watch and its brilliant gold guard-chain, his eyes gloated upon them. What, he thought, should he have been without them! About half-past three o'clock he retired to his bedroom and resigned himself into the hands of the tiptop hairdresser from the Strand whose agreeable manipulations and still more agreeable small-talk occupied upward of an hour. After coming from that functionary's hands, he devoted himself to the other important duties of the toilet.

It took him a good while; but in the end he was supremely successful. He wore black tights (*i.e.*, pantaloons fitting closely to his legs, and tied around his ankles with black ribbons), silk stockings, and shoes with glittering silver buckles. His white neckerchief was tied with great elegance, not a wrinkle superfluous being visible in it. His shirt-front, of lace, had two handsome diamond pins, connected together by a little delicate gold chain, glistening in the middle of it. Then he had a white waistcoat edge, next a crimson one, and lastly a glorious sky-blue satin waistcoat, spangled all over with gold flowers inwrought—and across it hung his new gold watch-guard, and his silver guard for his eyeglass, producing an inconceivably fine effect. His coat was light-

brown, of exquisite cut, fitting him as closely as if he had been born in it, and with burnished brass buttons of sugar-loaf shape. Thus habited, he stood before his glass, bowing fifty different times, and adjusting his expression to various elegant forms of address. He was particularly struck with the combined effect of the two side-locks of his hair curling toward each eye, and of the hair underneath his chin curving upward on each side of his mouth in complete symmetry.

When at length his labors had been completed, he felt great composure of mind and a consciousness of the decisive effect he must produce upon those into whose presence he was soon to be ushered. His "carriage" was presently announced; and, after keeping it standing a few minutes, merely for form's sake, he gently placed his hat upon his head, drew on one glove, took his little ebony cane in his hand, and, with a hurried inward prayer that he might be equal to the occasion, stepped forth from his apartment and passed on to the glass-coach. Such a brillant little figure had never before issued, nor will perhaps ever again issue, from the Cabbage-Stalk Hotel. The waiters whom he passed inclined toward him with instinctive reverence. He was *very* fine, to be sure; but who, they justly thought, could be dressed too finely that had ten thousand a year, and was going to dine with a lord in Grosvenor Square?

At each side of Lord Dreddlington's house were carriages setting down with tremendous uproar. Mr. Titmouse felt his color going, and his heart began to beat much faster than usual. 'Twas quite in vain that he "hemmed" two or three times by way of trying to reassure himself—he felt that his hour was come; and he would have been glad at the moment for any decent excuse for driving off home again, and putting off the evil day a little longer. Opposite the dreaded door had now drawn up Mr. Titmouse's glass-coach; and the coachman, slowly alighting, threw the reins on his quiet horses' backs, and gave a modest *rat-tat-tat* at the door without ringing.

"What name shall I give, sir?" said he, returning to his coach.

"Titmouse—Mr. Titmouse," replied our hero hurriedly, as the lofty door was thrown open by the corpulent porter, dis-

closing several footmen, with powdered heads, standing in the hall waiting for him.

"Mr. Titmouse!" exclaimed the coachman to the servants:

"D—me, sir—don't bother *me*!"

then, addressing again his flustered fare—"When shall I come back for you, sir?"

"D— me, sir—don't bother *me*," faltered Titmouse; and

the next moment he was in the hands of the Philistines—the door was closed upon him. All his presence of mind had evaporated; the excellent lessons given him by Mr. Gammon had disappeared like breath upon the polished mirror.

Tho Lord Dreddlington's servants had never before seen in the house so strange an object as poor little Titmouse, they were of far too highly polished manners to appear to notice anything unusual. They silently motioned him upstairs with a bland courteous air, he carrying his little agate-headed cane in one hand and his new hat in the other. A gentlemanly person in a full black dress suit opened the drawing-room door for him, with an elegant inclination, which Titmouse very gracefully returned. A faint mist seemed to be in the drawing-room for a second or two; quickly clearing away, however, Titmouse beheld, at the upper end, but two figures, that of an old gentleman and a young lady—in fact, the Earl of Dreddlington and Lady Cecilia.

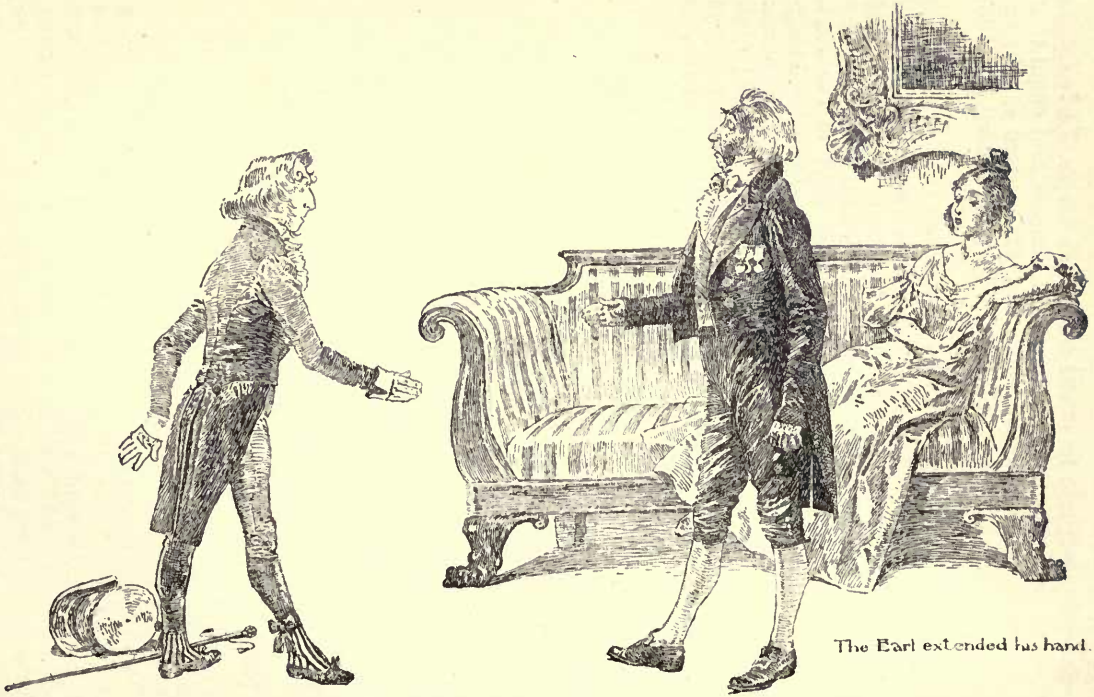
Now that great man had not been a whit behindhand, in the matter of dress, with the little creature now trembling before him, being, in truth, full as anxious to make an effective first appearance in the eyes of Titmouse as he in those of the Earl of Dreddlington. And each had succeeded in his way. There was little or no substantial difference between them. The Right Honorable the Earl of Dreddlington was an old experienced fool, and Tittlebat Titmouse a young inexperienced one. We have seen how anxious was our little friend to appear as became the occasion before his great kinsman; who, in his turn, had several times during the day exulted secretly in the anticipation of the impression which must be produced upon the mind of Titmouse by the sudden display, in the Earl's person, of the sublimest distinctions which, short of royalty, society can bestow.

It had once or twice occurred to the Earl whether he could find any fair excuse for appearing in his full general's uniform; but on maturer reflection, governed by that simplicity and severity of taste which ever distinguished him, he abandoned that idea, and appeared in a plain blue coat, white waistcoat, and black knee-breeches. But on his left breast glittered one or two foreign orders, and across his waistcoat was the broad red ribbon of the Bath. His hair was white and fine; his cold blue eye and haughty lip gave him an expression of

severe dignity; and he stood erect as an arrow. Lady Cecilia reclined on the sofa, with an air of languor and ennui that had become habitual with her, and was dressed in glistening white satin, with a necklace of large and very beautiful pearls.

The Earl was standing in an attitude of easy grace to receive his guest, as to whose figure and height, by the way, he was quite in the dark—Mr. Titmouse might be a great or a little man, and forward or bashful, and require a corresponding demeanor and address on the part of the Earl. "Ah, my God!" involuntarily exclaimed Lord Dreddlington to himself the instant his eye caught sight of Titmouse, who approached slowly, making profound and formal obeisances. The Earl stood rooted to the spot he had occupied when Titmouse entered. If his servants had turned an ape into the drawing-room, the Earl could scarcely have felt or exhibited greater amazement than he now experienced for a moment. "Ah, my God!" thought he, "what fool have we here? What creature is this?" Then it flashed across his mind: "May this be THE FUTURE LORD DRELINCOURT?" He was on the point of recoiling from his suddenly discovered kinsman in dismay (as for Lady Cecilia, she gazed at him, through the glass, in silent horror, after a faint exclamation, on his first becoming visible, of "Gracious! Papa!"), when his habitual self-command came to his assistance, and, advancing very slowly a step or two toward Titmouse—who, after a hurried glance around him, saw no place to deposit his hat and cane upon except the floor, on which he accordingly dropped them—the Earl extended his hand, slightly compressed the tips of Titmouse's fingers, and bowed courteously, but with infinite concern in his features.

"I am happy, Mr. Titmouse, to make your acquaintance," said the Earl slowly. "Sir, I have the honor to present you to my daughter, the Lady Cecilia." Titmouse, who by this time had got into a sort of cold sweat—a condition from which the Earl was really not *very* far removed—made a very profound and formal bow (he had been taking lessons from a posture-master at one of the theaters), first to the Earl, and then to Lady Cecilia, who rose about two inches from the sofa and then sank again upon it, without removing her eyes from the figure of Titmouse, who went on bowing, first



The Earl extended his hand.

to the one and then to the other, till the Earl had engaged him in conversation.

"It gives me pleasure, sir, to see that you are punctual in your engagements. I am so, too, sir, and owe no small portion of my success in life to it. Punctuality, sir, in small matters leads to punctuality in great matters." This was said in a very deliberate and pompous manner.

"Oh, yes, my lord! quite so, your lordship," stammered Titmouse, suddenly recollecting a part of Gammon's instructions; "to be sure—wouldn't have been behindtime, your lordship, for a minute, my lord; uncommon bad manners, if it pleases your lordship——"

"Will you be seated, sir?" interrupted the Earl, deliberately motioning him to a chair, and then sitting down beside him; after which the Earl seemed, for a second or two, to forget himself, staring in silence at Titmouse, and then in consternation at Lady Cecilia. "I—I—" said he, suddenly recollecting himself—"beg your par—sir, I mean I congratulate you upon your recent success. Sir, it must have been rather a surprise to you?"

"Oh, yes, sir—my lord, most uncommon, may it please your lordship—particular—but *right is right*—please your lordship——"

["O Heavens! merciful Heavens! How horrid is all this! Am I awake or only dreaming? 'Tis an idiot—and what's worse, a *vulgar* idiot. My God! *And this thing may be Lord Drelincourt.*" This was what was passing through Lord Dreddlington's mind while his troubled eye was fixed upon Titmouse.]

"It is, indeed, Mr. Titmouse," replied his lordship, "very true; sir, what you say is correct. Quite so; exactly." His eye was fixed on Titmouse, but his words were uttered, as it were, mechanically, and in a musing manner. It flitted for a moment across his mind whether he should ring the bell and order the servant to show out of the house the fearful imp that had just been shown into it; but at that critical moment he detected poor Titmouse's eye fixed with a kind of reverent intensity upon his lordship's glittering orders. 'Twas a lucky look, that, for Titmouse, for it began to melt away the ice that was getting round the little heart of his august relative. 'Twas evident that the poor young man

had not been accustomed to society, thought the Earl with an approach toward the compassionate mood. He was frightfully dressed, to be sure; and as for his speech, he was manifestly overawed by the Presence in which he found himself (that thought melted a little more of the ice). Yet, was it not evident that he had *some* latent power of appreciating real distinction when he beheld it? (The little heart here lost *all* the ice that had begun so suddenly to incrust it.) And again, he has actually thrust out the intolerable Aubrey, and is now lawful owner of Yatton—of TEN THOUSAND A YEAR——

"Did you see the review to-day, sir?" inquired the Earl, rather blandly. "His Majesty was there, sir, and seemed to enjoy the scene." Titmouse with a timid air said that he had not seen it, as he had been upon the river. After a few more general observations—"Will you permit me, sir? It is from A QUARTER requiring the highest—a-hem!" said the Earl as a note was brought him, which he immediately opened and read. As Lady Cecilia also appeared engaged in reading, Titmouse had a moment's breathing time and interval of relief. What would he have given, he thought, for some other person, or several persons, to come in and divide the attention—the intolerably oppressive attention of the two august individuals then before him!

He seized the opportunity to cast a furtive glance around the room. It opened into a second, which opened into a third: how spacious each and lofty! And glittering glass chandeliers in each! What chimney and pier glasses! What rich crimson satin curtains—they must have cost twelve or fourteen shillings a yard at least!—The carpets of the finest Brussels—and they felt like velvet to the feet; then the brackets, of marble and gold, with snowy statues and vases glistening upon each; chairs so delicate, and gilded all over—he almost feared to sit down on them. Then there was the Lady Cecilia—a lady of high rank! How rich her dress—and how haughtily beautiful she looked as she reclined upon the sofa! And the Earl of Dreddlington—there he was, reading, doubtless, some letter from the King or one of the royal family—a man of great rank—resplendent in his decorations—all just as he had seen in pictures and heard and read of—what must that red ribbon have cost? He had never

seen any of such a breadth. It must have been manufactured on purpose for the Earl! How white were his hands! And he had an antique massive signet-ring on his forefinger, and two glittering rings at least on each of his little fingers—positively Titmouse at length began to regard him almost as a god: and yet the amazing thought occurred that this august being was allied to him by the ties of relationship!

The gentleman in black just then entered the room, and, advancing slowly and noiselessly toward the Earl, said, in a quiet manner, "Dinner, my lord," and retired. Into what new scenes of splendid embarrassment was this the signal for Mr. Titmouse's introduction? thought our friend, and trembled.

"Mr. Titmouse, will you give your arm to the Lady Cecilia?" said the Earl, motioning him to the sofa. Up jumped Titmouse, and approached hastily the recumbent beauty, who languidly arose, arranged her train with one hand, and with the other having drawn on her glove, just barely touched the proffered arm of Titmouse, extended toward her at a very acute angle, and at right angles with his own body—stammering, "Honor to take your ladyship—uncommon proud—this way, my lady." Lady Cecilia took no more notice of him than if he had been a dumb waiter, walking beside him in silence—the Earl following. To think that a nobleman of high rank was walking *behind* him!

Would to heaven, thought the embarrassed Titmouse, that he had two fronts, one for the Earl behind, and the other to be turned full toward Lady Cecilia! The tall servants, powdered and in light blue liveries, stood like a guard of honor around the dining-room door. That room was extensive and lofty: what à solitary sort of state were they about to dine in! Titmouse felt cold, tho it was summer, and trembled as he followed, rather than led, his haughty partner to her seat; and then was motioned into his own by the Earl, himself sitting down opposite a chased silver soup-tureen! A servant stood behind Lady Cecilia and Titmouse; also on the left of the Earl, while on his right, between his lordship and the glistening sideboard, stood a portly gentleman in black, with a bald head and a somewhat haughty countenance.

Though Titmouse had touched nothing since breakfast, he

felt not the slightest inclination to eat, and would have given the world to have dared to say as much, and be at once relieved from a vast deal of anxiety. Titmouse got through the soup—of which about half-a-dozen spoonfuls only were put into his plate—pretty fairly. Anywhere else than at Lord Dreddlington's, Titmouse would have thought it thin watery stuff with a few green things chopped up and swimming in it; but now he perceived that it had a very superior flavor. How some red mullet, enclosed in paper, puzzled poor Titmouse, is best known to himself.

"The Lady Cecilia will take wine with you, Mr. Titmouse, I dare say," observed the Earl; and in a moment's time, but with perfect deliberation, the servants poured wine into the two glasses. "Your ladyship's health, my lady," faltered Titmouse. She slightly bowed, and a faint smile glimmered at the corners of her mouth, but unobserved by Titmouse.

"I think you said, Mr. Titmouse," quoth the Earl, some time afterward, "that you had not yet taken possession of Yatton?"

"No, my lord; but I go down the day after to-morrow—quite—if I may say it, my lord—quite in style," answered Titmouse, in a style of humble and hesitating jocularity.

"Ha, ha!" exclaimed the Earl gently.

"Had you any acquaintance with the Aubreys, Mr. Titmouse?" inquired the Lady Cecilia.

"No, my lady."

"Do you form a new establishment at Yatton, sir?" inquired the Earl, "or take to any part of that of your predecessor?"

"I have not, please your lordship, made up my mind yet exactly—should like to know your lordship's opinion."

"Why, sir, I should be governed by circumstances—by circumstances, sir; when you get there, sir, you will be better able to judge of the course you should pursue."

"Do you intend, Mr. Titmouse, to live in town, or in the country?" inquired Lady Cecilia.

"A little of both, my lady—but mostly in town; because, as your ladyship sees, the country is *devilish* dull—'pon my life, my lady—my lord—beg a thousand pardons," he added, bowing to both, and blushing violently. Here he *had* com-

mitted himself; but his august companions bowed to him very kindly, and he presently recovered his self-possession.

"Are you fond of hunting, Mr. Titmouse?" inquired the Earl.

"Why, my lord, can't exactly say that I am—but, your lordship sees, cases alter circumstances, and when I get down there among the country gents, p'r'aps I may do as they do, my lord."

"I presume, Mr. Titmouse, you have scarcely chosen a town residence yet?" inquired Lady Cecilia.

"When I get down among the country gents p'raps I may do as they do, my lord"

"No, my lady—not fixed it yet—was thinking of taking Mr. Aubrey's house in Grosvenor Street, understanding it is to be sold;" then turning toward the Earl, "because, as your lordship sees, I was thinking of getting into *both* the nests of the old birds, while both are warm," he added, with a very faint smile.

"Exactly; yes—I see, sir—I understand you," replied Lord Dreddlington, sipping his wine. His manner rather discom-

posed Titmouse, to whom it then very naturally occurred that the Earl might be warmly attached to the Aubreys, and not relish their being spoken of so lightly; so Titmouse hastily and anxiously added—"your lordship sees I was most *particular* sorry to make the Aubreys turn out. A most uncommon respectable gent, Mr. Aubrey: I assure your lordship I think so."

"I had not the honor of his acquaintance, sir," replied the Earl coldly and with exceeding stiffness, which flustered Titmouse not a little; and a pause occurred in the conversation for a minute or two. Dinner had now considerably advanced, and Titmouse was beginning to grow a *little* familiar with the routine of matters. Remembering Gammon's caution concerning the wine, and also observing how very little was drunk by the Earl and Lady Cecilia, Titmouse did the same, and during the whole of dinner had scarcely three full glasses of wine.

"How long is it," inquired the Earl, addressing his daughter, "since they took that house?" Lady Cecilia could not say. "Stay—now I recollect—surely it was just before my appointment to the Household. Yes; it was about that time, I now recollect. I am alluding, Mr. Titmouse," continued the Earl, addressing him in a very gracious manner, "to an appointment under the Crown of some little distinction, which I was solicited to accept, at the personal instance of his Majesty, on the occasion of our party coming into power —I mean that of Lord Steward of the Household."

"Dear me, my lord! Indeed! Only to think, your lordship!" exclaimed Titmouse, with infinite deference in his manner, which encouraged the Earl to proceed.

"That, sir, was an office of great importance, and I had some hesitation in undertaking its responsibility. But, sir, when I had once committed myself to my sovereign and my country, I resolved to give them my best services. I had formed plans for effecting very extensive alterations, sir, in that department of the public service, which I have no doubt would have given great satisfaction to the country as soon as the nature of my intentions became generally understood; when faction, sir, unfortunately prevailed, and we were compelled to relinquish office."

"Dear me, my lord! How particular sorry I am to hear it, my lord!" exclaimed Titmouse, as he gazed at the baffled statesman with an expression of respectful sympathy.

"Sir, it gives me sincere satisfaction," said the Earl, after a pause, "to hear that our political opinions agree——"

"Oh, yes! my lord, quite; *sure* of that——"

"I assure you, sir, that some little acquaintance with the genius and spirit of the British constitution has satisfied me that this country can never be safely or advantageously governed except on sound Whig principles." He paused.

"Yes, my lord; it's quite true, your lordship——" interposed Titmouse reverentially.

"That, sir, is the only way I know of by which aristocratic institutions can be brought to bear effectively upon, to blend harmoniously with, the interests of the lower orders—the people, Mr. Titmouse." Titmouse thought this wonderfully fine, and sat listening as to an oracle of political wisdom. The Earl, observing it, began to form a much higher opinion of his little kinsman. He resumed with great dignity: "The unfortunate gentleman, your predecessor at Yatton, sir, if he had but allowed himself to have been guided by those who had mixed in public affairs before he was born——"

"'Pon my word, my lord, he was, I've heard, a d——d Tory!—O my lady! my lord! humbly beg pardon," he added, turning pale; but the fatal word had been uttered, and heard by both; and he felt as if he could have sunk through the floor.

"Shall I have the honor of taking another glass of wine with you, sir?" inquired the Earl, rather gravely and severely, as if wishing Mr. Titmouse fully to appreciate the fearful breach of etiquette of which he had just been guilty. After they had bowed to each other, a very awkward pause occurred, which was at length broken by the considerate Lady Cecilia.

"Are you fond of the opera, Mr. Titmouse?"

"Very, my lady—most particular," replied Titmouse, who had been there once only.

"Do you prefer the opera, or the ballet? I mean the music or the dancing?"

"Oh, I understand your ladyship. 'Pon my word, my lady, I prefer them both. The dancing is most uncommon superior, tho I must say, my lady, the lady dancers there do most uncommonly—*rather*, I should say——" He stopped abruptly; his face flushed, and he felt as if he had burst into a perspira-

tion. What the deuce was he about? It seemed as if some devil within were urging him on, from time to time, to commit himself. Good gracious! another word, and out would have come his opinion as to the shocking indecency of the ballet!

"I understand you, sir; I quite agree with you," said Lady Cecilia calmly; "the ballet *does* come on at a sad late hour; I often wish they would now and then have the ballet first."

"'Pon my life, my lady," quoth Titmouse, eagerly snatching at the plank that was thrown to him; "that *is* what I meant—nothing else, upon my soul, your ladyship."

"Do you intend taking a box there, Mr. Titmouse?" inquired her ladyship, with an appearance of interest in the expected answer.

"Why, your ladyship, they say a box there is a *precious* long figure; but in course, my lady, when I've got to rights a little with my property—your ladyship understands—I shall do the correct thing."

Here a very long pause ensued. How dismally quiet and deliberate was everything! The very servants, how noiselessly they waited! Everything done just when it was wanted, yet no hurry or bustle or noise; and they looked so composed—so much at their ease! He fancied that they had scarce anything else to do than look at him and watch all his movements, which greatly embarrassed him, and he began to *hate* them. He tried hard to inspirit himself with a reflection upon his own suddenly acquired and really great personal importance; absolute master of Ten Thousand a-Year, a relation of the great man at whose table he sat, and whose hired servants they were; but then his timorously raised eye would light, for instance, upon the splendid *insignia* of the Earl, and he felt as oppressed as ever. What would he not have given for a few minutes' interval and sense of complete freedom and independence? And were these to be his feelings ever hereafter? Was this the sort of tremulous apprehension of offense, and embarrassment as to his every move, to which he was to be doomed in high life? Oh that he had but been *born* to it, like the Earl and the Lady Cecilia!

"Were you ever in the House of Lords, Mr. Titmouse?" inquired Lord Dreddlington suddenly, after casting about for

some little time for a topic on which he might converse with Titmouse.

"No, my lord, never—should most uncommon like to see it, my lord," replied Titmouse eagerly.

"Certainly, it is an impressive spectacle, sir, and well worth seeing."

"I suppose, my lord, your lordship goes there every day?"

"Why, sir, I believe *I am* pretty punctual in my attendance. I was there to-day, sir, till the House rose. Sir, I am of opinion that hereditary legislators—a practical anomaly in a free state like this, but one which has innumerable unperceived advantages to recommend it—sir, our country expects at our hands, in discharge of so grave a trust—in short, if we were not to be true to—we who are in a peculiar sense the guardians of public liberty—if we were once to betray our trust—let me trouble you, sir, for a little of that ——," said the Earl, using some foreign word which Titmouse had never heard of before, and looking toward a delicately constructed fabric, as of compressed snow, that stood before Titmouse; a servant stood in a twinkling beside him with his lordship's plate.

Ah, me! that I should have to relate so sad an event as presently occurred to Titmouse! He took a spoon and, imagining the glistening fabric before him to be as solid as it looked, brought to bear upon it an adequate degree of force, even as if he had been going to scoop out a piece of Stilton cheese—and inserting his spoon at the summit of the snowy and deceitful structure, souse to the bottom went spoon, hand, coat-cuff and all, and a very dismal noise evidenced that the dish on which the spoon had descended with so much force was no longer a dish. It was, in fact, broken in halves, and the liquid from within ran about on the cloth. . . . A cluster of servants was quickly around him. . . . A mist came over his eyes; the color deserted his cheek; and he had a strange feeling, as if verily the end of all things was at hand.

"I beg you will think nothing of it—it really signifies nothing at all, Mr. Titmouse," said the Earl kindly, observing his agitation.

"Oh, dear! Oh, my lord—your ladyship—what an *uncommon* stupid ass!"

"Pray, *don't* distress yourself, Mr. Titmouse," said Lady Cecilia, really feeling for his evident misery, "or you will distress *us*."

"I beg—humbly beg pardon—please your lordship—your ladyship. I'll replace it with the best in London the very first thing in the morning." Here the servant beside him,

Souse to the bottom!

who was arranging the table-cloth, uttered a faint sound of suppressed laughter, which disconcerted Titmouse still more.

"Give yourself no concern—'tis only a *trifle*, Mr. Titmouse! —You understand, ha, ha?" said the Earl kindly.

"But if your lordship will only allow me—expense is no object—I know the very best shop in Oxford Street——"

"Suppose we take a glass of champagne together, Mr. Titmouse?" said the Earl rather peremptorily; and Titmouse

had sense enough to be aware that he was to drop the subject. It was a good while before he recovered even the little degree of self-possession which he had had since first entering Lord Dreddlington's house. He had afterward no very distinct recollection of the manner in which he got through the rest of dinner, but a general sense of his having been treated with the most kind and delicate forbearance—no *fuss* made. Suppose such an accident had occurred at Satin Lodge or even Alibi House!

Shortly after the servants had withdrawn, Lady Cecilia rose to retire. Titmouse, seeing the Earl approaching the bell, anticipated him in ringing it, and then darted to the door with the speed of a lamplighter to open it, as he did, just before a servant had raised his hand to it on the outside. Then he stood within, and the servant without, each bowing, and Lady Cecilia passed between them with stately step, her eyes fixed upon the ground, and her lip compressed, with the effort to check her inclination to a smile—perhaps, even laughter. Titmouse was now left alone with Lord Dreddlington, and, on resuming his seat, most earnestly renewed his entreaties to be allowed to replace the dish which he had broken, assuring Lord Dreddlington that "money was no object at all." He was encountered, however, with so stern a negative by his lordship that, with a hurried apology, he dropped the subject, the Earl, however, good-naturedly adding that he had perceived the *joke* intended by Mr. Titmouse—which was certainly a very good one! This would have set off poor Titmouse again, but a glance at the face of his magnificent host sealed his lips.

"I have heard it said, Mr. Titmouse," presently commenced the Earl, "that you have been engaged in mercantile pursuits during the period of your exclusion from the estates which you have just recovered. Is it so, sir?"

"Ye-e-e-s—sir—my lord——" replied Titmouse, hastily considering whether or not he should altogether *sink* the shop, but he dared hardly venture upon so very decisive a lie—"I was, please your lordship, in one of the greatest establishments in the mercery line in London—at the West End, my lord; most confidential, my lord; management of everything; but, somehow, my lord, I never *took to it*—your lordship understands?"

"Perfectly, sir; I can quite appreciate your feelings. But, sir, the mercantile interests of this great country are not to be overlooked. Those who are concerned in them are frequently respectable persons."

"Begging pardon, my lord—no they a'n't—if your lordship only knew them as well as I do, my lord. Most uncommon low people. Do anything to turn a penny, my lord; and often sell damaged goods for best."

"It is very possible, sir, that there may exist irregularities, *eccentricities*, ha! ha! of that description; but upon the whole, sir, I am disposed to think that there are many very decent persons engaged in trade. I must remind you, sir, that your acquaintance with the principles and leading details of mercantile transactions—undoubtedly one of the mainsprings of the national greatness—may hereafter be of use to you, sir."

"Yes, my lord, 'pon my soul—when I'm furnishing my houses in town and country, I mean to go to market myself—please your lordship, I know a trick or two of the trade, and can't be taken in, my lord. For instance, my lord, there's Tag-rag—a-hem! hem!" He paused abruptly and looked somewhat confusedly at the Earl.

"I did not mean *that* exactly," said his lordship, unable to resist a smile. "Pray, fill your glass, Mr. Titmouse." He did so. "You are of course aware that you have the absolute patronage of the borough of Yatton, Mr. Titmouse?—It occurs to me, that as our political opinions agree, and unless I am presumptuous, sir, in so thinking—I may be regarded, in a political point of view, as the head of the family—you understand me, I hope, Mr. Titmouse?"

"Exactly, my lord—'pon my soul, it's all correct, my lord."

"Well—then, sir—the family interests, Mr. Titmouse, must be looked after——"

"Oh! in course, my lord, only too happy—certainly, my lord, we shall, I hope, make a very *interesting* family, if your lordship so pleases—I *can* have no objection, my lord!"

"It was a vile, a disgraceful trick, by which Ministers popped in their own man for our borough, Mr. Titmouse."

[Lord Dreddlington alluded to a new writ that had been moved for immediately on Mr. Aubrey's acceptance of the Chiltern Hundreds, and, before the Opposition could be

prepared for such a step, that had been sent down without delay to Yatton, whereupon Sir Percival Pickering, a keen unflinching Tory, had been returned as member before the Titmouse influence could be brought into the field.]

"Yes, my lord—Sir what-d'ye-call-him *was* a trifle too sharp for us in that business, wasn't he?"

"It has succeeded, sir, for the moment, but—" continued his lordship in a very significant and stately manner—"it is quite possible that their triumph may be of very short duration—Mr. Titmouse. Those who, like myself, are at headquarters—let me see you fill your glass, Mr. Titmouse.—I have the honor to congratulate you, sir, on the recovery of your rights, and to wish you health and long life in the enjoyment of them," quoth the Earl with an air of the loftiest urbanity.

"May it please your lordship, your lordship's most uncommon polite"—commenced Titmouse, rising and standing while he spoke—for he had had experience enough of society to be aware that when a gentleman's health is drunk on important occasions it becomes him to rise and acknowledge the compliment in such language as he can command—"and am particularly proud—a—a—I beg to propose, my lord, your lordship's very *superior* good health, and many thanks." Then he sat down, each poured out another glass of claret, and Titmouse drank his off.

"It is extremely singular, sir," said the Earl musingly, after a considerable pause, "the reverses in life that one hears of!"

"Yes, my lord, your lordship's quite true, 'pon my word! —Most uncommon *ups* and *downs!* Lord, my lord, only to fancy *me*, a few months ago, trotting up and down Oxford Street with my yard mea——" He stopped short and colored violently.

"Well, sir," replied the Earl, with an expression of bland and dignified sympathy, "however humble might have been your circumstances, it is a consolation to reflect that there is nothing dishonorable in being poor, when—you cannot help it! Reverses of fortune, sir, have happened to some of the greatest characters in our history. You remember Alfred, sir!" Titmouse bowed assentingly; but had he been questioned, could have told, I suspect, as little about the matter—as the Earl himself.

"Allow me, sir, to ask whether you have come to any arrangement with your late opponent concerning the back-rents?" inquired the Earl, with a great appearance of interest.

"No, my lord, not yet; but my solicitors say they'll soon *have the screw on*, please your lordship—that's just what they say—their very words.

"Indeed, sir!" replied the Earl gravely. "What is the sum to which they say you are entitled, sir?"

"Sixty thousand pounds, my lord, at least—quite set me up at starting, my lord," replied Titmouse with great glee; but the Earl shuddered involuntarily for a moment, and sipped his wine in silence.

"By the way, Mr. Titmouse," said he, after a considerable pause, "I trust you will forgive me for suggesting whether it would not be a prudent step for you to go to one of the universities for at least a twelvemonth——"

"Humbly begging your lordship's pardon, am not I too old? I've heard they're all a pack of overgrown schoolboys there—and learn nothing but a bit of some old languages that a'n't the least of use nowadays, seeing they a'n't *spoke* now anywhere"—replied Titmouse—"besides, I've talked the thing over with Mr. Gammon, my lord——"

"Mr. Gammon? Allow me, sir, to ask who that may be?"

"One of my solicitors, my lord; a most remarkable clever man, and an out-and-out lawyer, my lord. It was he that found out all about my case, my lord. If your lordship was only to see him for a moment, your lordship would say, what a *remarkable* clever man that is!"

"You will forgive my curiosity, sir—but it must have surely required very ample means to have carried on so arduous a lawsuit as that which has just terminated so successfully?"

"Oh, yes, my lord!—Quirk, Gammon, and Snap did all that; and, between me and your lordship, I suppose I shall have to come down a pretty long figure, all on the *nail*, as your lordship understands; but I mean them to get it all out of that respectable gent, Mr. Aubrey."

By quietly pressing his questions, the Earl got a good deal more out of Titmouse than he was aware, concerning Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, and conceived a special dislike for Gam-

mon. The Earl gave Titmouse decisive hints about the necessity of being on guard with such people—and hoped that he would not commit himself to anything important without consulting his lordship, who would of course give him the advantage of his experience in the affairs of the world, and open his eyes to the designs of those whose only object was to make a prey of him. Titmouse began to feel that here, at length, he had met with a *real* friend—one whose suggestions were worthy of being received with the profoundest deference. Soon afterward he had the good fortune to please the Earl beyond expression, by venturing timidly to express his admiration of the splendid ribbon worn by his lordship; who took the opportunity of explaining that and the other marks of distinction he wore, and others which he was entitled to wear, at great length and with much minuteness—so as that at length he caused Titmouse to believe that he, Lord Dreddlington—the august head of the family—must have rendered more signal service, somehow or other, to his country, and also done more to win the admiration and gratitude of foreign countries, than almost any other man living.

"Well, Mr. Titmouse," at length observed the Earl, after looking at his watch, "shall we adjourn to the drawing-room? The fact is, sir, that Lady Cecilia and I have an evening engagement at the Duchess of Diamond's. I much regret being unable to take you with us, sir; but, as it is, shall we rejoin the Lady Cecilia?" continued his lordship, rising. Up jumped Titmouse; and the Earl and he were soon in the drawing-room, where, besides the Lady Cecilia, sat another lady, to whom he was not introduced in any way. This was Miss Macspleuchan, a poor relation, who had entered the house of the Earl of Dreddlington, in order to eat the *bitter bread of dependence.*

She was a sort of companion of Lady Cecilia, and entirely dependent upon her and the Earl for her subsistence. She was sitting on the sofa, beside Lady Cecilia, when Titmouse re-entered the drawing-room; and Lady Cecilia eyed him through her glass with infinite *nonchalance*, even when he had advanced to within a few feet of her. He made her, as she rose to take her seat and prepare tea, a most obsequious bow; absurd as was the style of its performance, Miss Mac-

spleuchan saw that there was politeness in the intention; 'twas moreover a courtesy toward herself, that was unusual from the Earl's guests; and these considerations served to take off the edge of the ridicule and contempt with which Lady Cecilia had been preparing her to receive their newly discovered kinsman. After standing for a second or two near the sofa, Titmouse ventured to sit himself down upon it—on the very edge only—as if afraid of disturbing Lady Cecilia, who was reclining on it with an air of languid hauteur.

"So you're going, my lady, to a dance to-night, as my lord says?" quoth Titmouse respectfully; "hope your ladyship will enjoy yourself!"

"We regret that you do not accompany us, Mr. Titmouse," said Lady Cecilia, slightly inclining toward him, and glancing at Miss Macspleuchan with a faint and bitter smile.

"Should have been most uncommon proud to have gone, your ladyship," replied Titmouse, as a servant brought him a cup of tea. "These cups and saucers, my lady, come from abroad, I suppose? Now, I dare say, tho they've *rather* a funny look, they cost a good deal?"

"I really do not know, sir; we have had them a very long while."

"'Pon my life, my lady, I like them amazing!" Seeing her ladyship not disposed to talk, Titmouse became silent.

"Well, sir," said the Earl at last, but with dignified affability, "I need not repeat how highly gratified I feel at our introduction to each other. I trust you will henceforth consider yourself no stranger here——"

"Oh, 'pon my life, my lord!" exclaimed Titmouse, in a low tone, and with a sudden and profound bow.

"And that on your return from Yorkshire," continued the Earl, drawing on his gloves, "you will let us see you: we both feel great interest in your good fortune. Sir, I have the honor to wish you a good evening!" He extended his gloved hand to Mr. Titmouse, whose hand, however, he touched with little more than the ends of his fingers.

"We exceedingly regret that we must leave you, Mr. Titmouse," said Lady Cecilia with forced seriousness; "but as we wish to leave the duchess's early, in order to go to another ball, we must *go* early. Good evening, sir," and

having dropped him a slight formal curtsy, she quitted the drawing-room, followed by the Earl, Titmouse making four or five such bows as provoked a smile from all who witnessed them. The next moment he was alone with Miss Macspleuchan. Her unaffected, good-natured address made him feel more at home within the next five minutes than he had been since entering that frigid scene of foolish state.

He soon got pretty communicative with her, and told her about Miss Tag-rag and Miss Quirk, each of whom was absolutely dying of love for him and thought he was in love with her, which was not the case—far from it.

Then he told her of the great style in which he was going down to take possession of his estates, when a servant entered and informed him in a whisper that "his carriage had arrived." He considered that etiquette required him to depart immediately.

"Beg your pardon; but if ever you should come down to my estate in the country, shall be most uncommon proud to see your ladyship."

"I beg your pardon; you are mistaken, sir," interrupted Miss Macspleuchan hastily, and blushing scarlet; the fact being that Titmouse had not caught her name and naturally concluded that she also must be a lady of rank. Titmouse was so occupied with his efforts to make a graceful exit, that he did not catch the explanation of his mistake; and bowing almost down to the ground, reached the landing, where the tall servant, with a very easy grace, gave him his hat and cane, and preceded him down-stairs. As he descended, he felt in his pockets for some loose silver, and gave several shillings between the servants who stood in the hall to witness his departure; after which, one of them having opened the door and let down the steps of the glass-coach, Titmouse popped into it.

"Home, sir?" inquired the servant, as he closed the door.

"The Cabbage-Stalk Hotel, Covent Garden," replied Titmouse.

That was communicated to the coachman, and off rumbled the glass-coach.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH IS DISCLOSED HOW THE HERO JOURNEYS IN STATE TO TAKE POSSESSION OF HIS NEW-FOUND PROPERTY AND THE LAMENTABLE ENDING OF THE REVELRY AT THE HALL

Mr. Gammon was with Titmouse about half-past nine o'clock the next morning, sufficiently anxious to hear how he had got overnight. Titmouse immediately gave a full account of what had happened at Lord Dreddlington's, and, I fear, of a great deal more than might possibly have happened, but certainly *had* not; *e.g.*, his lordship's special laudation of Mr. Gammon as a "monstrous fine lawyer," which Titmouse swore were the very exact words of his lordship, and that "he should have been most happy to see Mr. Gammon," and a good deal to the like effect. Also that he had been "most uncommon thick" with "Lady Cicely" (so he pronounced her name), and that both she and Lord Dreddlington had "pressed him very hard to go with them to a ball *at a duke's!*" He made no mention of the broken trifle dish; said they had nearly a dozen servants to wait on them (only three sitting down to dinner), and twenty different sorts of wine, and no end of courses at dinner; that the Earl wore a star, and garter, and ribbons—which Gammon erroneously thought as apocryphal as the rest—and had told him that he, Titmouse, might one day wear them, and sit in the House of Lords, and had, moreover, advised him most strenuously to get into Parliament as soon as possible, as the "cause of the people wanted strengthening."

As soon as Titmouse had finished his little romance, Gammon proceeded to the chief object of his visit—their next day's journey. He said that he much regretted to say that Mr. Snap had expressed a very anxious wish to witness the triumph of Mr. Titmouse; and that Mr. Titmouse, unless he had some particular objection—"Oh, none, 'pon honor!—

poor Snap!—devilish good chap in a small way!" said Titmouse, and at once gave his consent—Gammon informing him that Mr. Snap would be obliged to return to town by the next day's coach. The reader will smile when I tell him, and, if a lady, will frown when she hears, that Miss Quirk was to be of the party—a point which her anxious father had secured some time ago. Mrs. Alias had declared that she saw no objection as Mr. Quirk would be constantly with his daughter, and Gammon had appeared most ready to bring about so desirable a result. He had also striven hard, unknown to his partners, to increase their number by the Tag-rags, who might have gone down, all three of them, if they had chosen, by coach, and so have returned. Titmouse, however, would not listen to the thing for one moment, and Gammon was forced to give up his little scheme.

Two dashing young fellows, fashionable friends of Titmouse (who had picked them up Heaven only knows where, but they never deserted him), infinitely to Gammon's annoyance, were to be of the party. One was a truly disgusting-looking fellow—a Mr. Puppy Yahoo—a man of pleasure about town. The other was Mr. Algernon Fitz-Snooks, a complete fool. A groom and a valet, both newly hired the day before, would complete the party of the morrow.

Gammon assured Titmouse that he had taken all the pains in the world to get up a triumphant entry into Yatton; and they were to be met by a procession. The people at the Hall, also, were under orders from Mr. Gammon to have a banquet prepared for nearly a hundred persons—in fact, all comers were to be welcome. As for the matter of carriages, Mr. Gammon said that probably Mr. Titmouse would call that morning on Mr. Axle, in Long Acre, and select one to his mind—it must be one with two seats—and Mr. Gammon had pointed out several which were, he thought, eligible, and would be shown to Mr. Titmouse. That would be the carriage in which Mr. Titmouse himself would travel; the second, Mr. Gammon had taken the liberty of already selecting. With this Mr. Gammon shook his hand and departed, saying that he should make his appearance the next morning at eleven o'clock—about which time they were all to start.

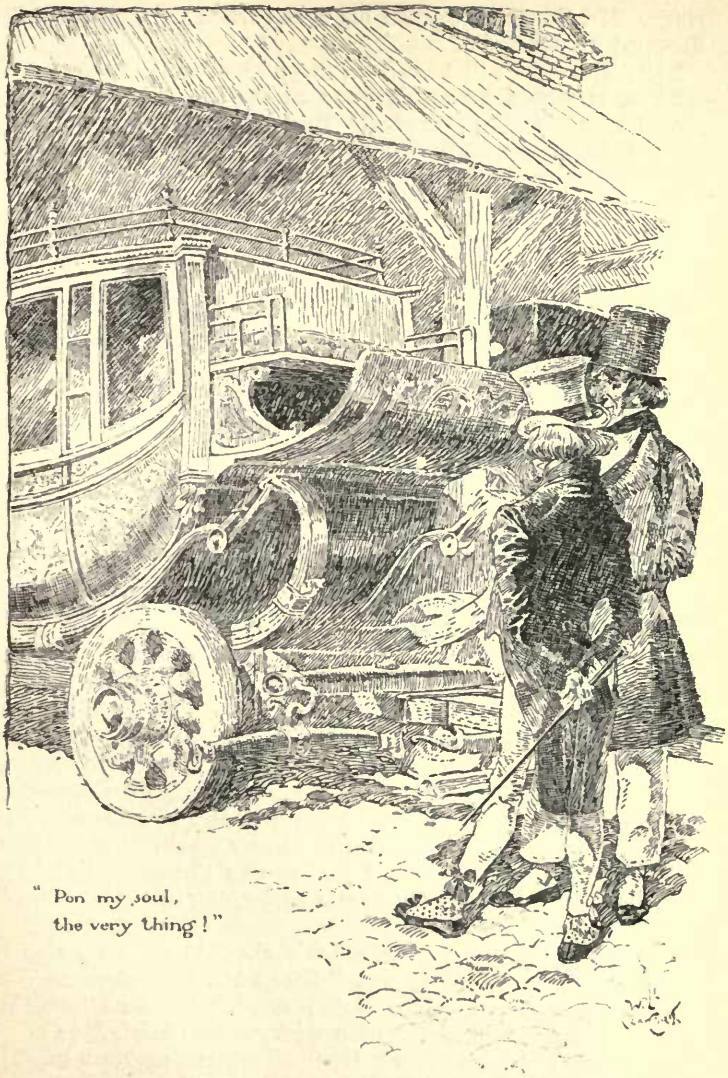
About an hour or two afterward, Titmouse made his appearance at the coach-builder's.

Mr. Axle showed Mr. Titmouse very obsequiously over his premises, pointing out the carriages which Mr. Gammon had the day before desired should be shown to him, and which Mr. Titmouse, with his glass stuck in his eye, examined with the air of a connoisseur—rapping with his agate-headed cane every now and them—now against his teeth, then against his legs. He did not seem perfectly satisfied with any of them; they looked "devilish plain and dull."

"Hollo—Mr. Axletree, or whatever your name is—what have we here? 'Pon my soul, the very thing!" he exclaimed, as his eye caught a splendid object—the state carriage of the ex-sheriff, with its gorgeously decorated panels. Mr. Axle was staggered for a moment, and scarce supposed Mr. Titmouse to be in earnest, but, observing the earnest, steadfast gaze with which he regarded the glittering object, he commenced a most tempting eulogium upon the splendid structure—remarking on the singularity of the circumstance of its happening just at that exact moment to be placed at his disposal by its former owner—a gentleman of great distinction, who had no longer any occasion for it. Mr. Axle had had numerous applications for it already; on hearing which, Titmouse got excited. The door was opened—he got in; sat on each seat—"Don't it hang beautifully?" inquired the confident proprietor, swaying about the head of the carriage as he spoke.

"What's your price, Mr. Axletree?" inquired Mr. Titmouse rather heatedly, as he got out of the carriage.

After some little higgle-haggling he bought it!!!—for there was nothing like closing at once where there was keen competition. Mr. Gammon could not have seen it when he was making his choice the day before! Punctual to his appointment, Mr. Gammon, on the ensuing morning, drew up to the Cabbage-Stalk, as near, at least, as he could get to it, in a hackney coach, with his portmanteau and carpet-bag. I say as near as he could, for round about the door stood a little crowd, gazing with a sort of awe on a magnificent vehicle standing there, with four horses harnessed to it. Gammon looked at his watch, as he entered the hotel, and asked which of the sheriff's carriages was standing at the door. The waiter to whom he spoke, who seemed nearly splitting with laughter, answered that it was Mr. Titmouse's car-



" Pon my soul,
the very thing!"

riage. Mr. Gammon opened his eyes, turned pale, and nearly dropped his umbrella.

"Mr. Titmouse's!" he echoed incredulously.

"Yes, sir—been here this hour at least packing; such a crowd all the while; everybody think's it's the sheriff, sir," replied the waiter. Mr. Gammon rushed up-stairs with great impetuosity, and burst into Mr. Titmouse's room. There was that gentleman, with his hat on, his hands stuck in his coat-pockets, a cigar in his mouth, and a tumbler of brandy and water before him. Mr. Yahoo and Mr. Fitz-Snooks and Mr. Snap were similarly occupied; and Mr. Quirk was sitting down with his hands in his pockets, and a glass of negus before him, with anything but a joyful expression of countenance.

"Is it possible, Mr. Titmouse—but can it be, that the monstrous thing now before the door is *your carriage?*" inquired Gammon, with dismay in his face.

"I—rather—think—it *is*," replied Titmouse, slightly disconcerted, but striving to look self-possessed.

"My dear sir," replied Gammon, in a kind of agony, "it is *impossible?* It never can be! Do you mean to say that you bought it at Mr. Axle's?"

"I should rather think so," replied Titmouse with a piqued air.

"He's been grossly imposing on you, sir!—Permit me to go at once and get you a proper vehicle."

"'Pon my life, Mr. Gammon, *I* think that it's a monstrous nice thing—a great bargain—and I've bought it and paid for it, that's more."

"Gentlemen, I appeal to *you*," confidently said Gammon, turning in an agony to Mr. Yahoo and Mr. Fitz-Snooks.

"As for *me*, sir," replied the former coolly, "since you ask my opinion, I confess I rather like the idea—ha! ha! 'Twill produce a *sensation;* that's something in this dull life! Eh, Snooks?"

"Ay—a—I confess I was a little shocked at first, but I think I'm getting over it now," lisped Mr. Fitz-Snooks. "I look upon it as an excellent joke; egad, it beats Chitterfield hollow, tho *he*, too, has done a trick or two lately."

"Did you purchase it as a joke, Mr. Titmouse?" inquired Gammon, ready to expire with vexation and anger.

"Why—a—'pon my life—if you ask *me*—wonder you don't see it! Of course I did!—Those that don't like it may ride, you know, in the other."

"We shall be hooted at, laughed at, wherever we go," said he, vehemently.

"Exactly—that's the *novelty* I like," said Mr. Yahoo, looking at Mr. Gammon with a smile of ineffable insolence.

Titmouse proved inexorable for once; he had bought and paid for the carriage; it suited his taste—and where was the harm of gratifying it? Besides, it was already packed—all was prepared for starting. Gammon gave it up, and, swallowing down his rage, endeavored to reconcile himself to this infernal predicament.

It seemed that Miss Quirk, however, was quite staggered on discovering the kind of persons who were to be their travelling companions. As for Mr. Yahoo, she recoiled from him with horror as soon as she had seen him. She had retired to a chamber, and presently sent a chambermaid to request Mr. Quirk to come to her.

He found her considerably agitated. She wished earnestly to return to Alibi House, and consented to proceed on her journey only on the express promise of Mr. Titmouse that no one should be in the carriage in which she went except Mr. Quirk and Mr. Gammon—unless, indeed, Mr. Titmouse thought proper to make the fourth.

Mr. Quirk, on this, sent for Mr. Gammon, who undertook to secure Mr. Titmouse's consent to that arrangement.

While he was thus closeted for about five or ten minutes with Mr. Quirk, one of the waiters informed Mr. Titmouse that a lad had brought a parcel for him, which he, the aforesaid lad, was himself to deliver into the hands of Mr. Titmouse. Accordingly there was presently shown into the room a little lad, in tarnished livery, in whom Titmouse recollected the boy belonging to Mr. Tag-rag's one-horse chaise, and who gave a small parcel into Mr. Titmouse's hands, "with Mrs. and Miss Tag-rag's respects."

As soon as he had quitted the room, "By Jove! What have we here?" exclaimed Titmouse, just a *little* flustered, as he cut open the string. Inside were three cambric pocket-handkerchiefs, marked with the initials "T. T." in *hair;* and Mr. Yahoo happening to unfold one of them, lo! in the

center was—also done in hair—the figure of a heart transfixed with an arrow!!! Mr. Yahoo roared, and Mr. Fitz-Snooks lisped: "Is she pretty, Tit? Where's her nest? Any *old* birds?—eh?"

Titmouse colored a little, then grinned, and put his finger to the side of his nose, and winked his eye, as if favoring the bright idea of Mr. Fitz-Snooks. On a sheet of gilt-edged paper, and sealed with a seal bearing the tender words "*Forget me not*," was written the following:

"SIR: Trusting you will excuse the liberty, I send you three best cambric pocket-handkerchiefs, which my daughter have marked with her own hair, and I beg your acceptance thereof, hoping you may be resigned to all that may befall you, which is the prayer of, dear sir, yours respectfully,

"MARTHA TAG-RAG.

"P.S.—My daughter sends what you may please to wish and accept. Shall we have the great happiness to see you here again?

"*Satin Lodge*, 18*th May*, 18—."

"Oh! the naughty old woman! Fie! Fie!" exclaimed Mr. Yahoo, with his intolerable smile.

"Where's Satin Lodge?" inquired Mr. Fitz-Snooks.

"It is a country-house on the—the Richmond road," said Titmouse, with a little hesitation; and just then the return of Gammon, who had assumed his usual calmness of manner, relieved him from his embarrassment. Mr. Gammon succeeded in effecting the arrangement suggested by Mr. Quirk and his daughter; and within about a quarter of an hour afterward behold the ex-sheriff's resplendent carriage filled by Miss Quirk and Titmouse and Mr. Quirk and Gammon—the groom and valet sitting on the coach-box; while in the other, a plain yellow carriage, covered with luggage, sat Mr. Yahoo, Mr. Fitz-Snooks, and Mr. Snap—Snap never having been so happy as at that moment.

Mr. Titmouse had laid aside his cigar in compliment to Miss Quirk, who had a long black veil on and an elegant light shawl, and looked uncommonly like a young bride setting off—oh, heavens! that it had been so!—on her wedding excursion. Mr. Gammon slouched his hat over his eyes and

inclined his head downward, fit to expire with vexation and disgust, as he observed the grin and tittering of the crowd around; but Titmouse, who was most splendidly dressed, took off his hat on sitting down, and bowed several times to, as he supposed, the admiring crowd.

"Get on, boys!" growled Mr. Gammon; and away they went, exciting equal surprise and applause wherever they went. No one that met them but must have taken Titmouse and Miss Quirk for a newly-married couple—probably the son or daughter of one of the sheriffs, who had lent the state carriage to add *éclat* to the interesting occasion.

As they approached the scene of triumph and rejoicing, and ascertained that they were within about a mile of the peaceful little village of Yatton, the travelers began to look out for indications of the kind which Mr. Gammon had mentioned to Titmouse, viz., a band and procession and an attendant crowd. It was then about five o'clock in the afternoon. The whole day had been overcast and the sky threatening; and as the two carriages came to that turning in the road which gave them the first glimpse of the Hall a fearful, long-continued flash of lightning burst from the angry heavens, followed, after an interval of but a second or two, by a peal of thunder which sounded as if a park of artillery was being repeatedly discharged immediately overhead. Down, then, came the rain like a deluge, and so it continued, with frequent returns of the thunder and lightning, for nearly a quarter of an hour.

The last turning brought them within sight of the village, and also of some fifty or sixty persons crowding under the hedges on each side—these were the procession; musicians, bannermen, footmen, horsemen—all dripping with wet, surely a piteous spectacle to behold. Out, however, they all turned, true to their orders, as soon as they saw the carriages, which immediately slackened their speed—the rain also somewhat abating. The flagman tried desperately to unroll a wet banner, with the words "WELCOME TO YATTON!" in gilded letters; while the band struck up "*See, the conquering hero comes!*" The principal part of the procession consisted of rather a miscellaneous assortment of scot-and-lot and potwalloper-looking people, all very wet and hungry, and ever and anon casting a look of devout expectation toward the Hall,

Scarcely a villager of Yatton was to be seen stirring; nor did any of the tenants of the estate join in the procession; even had they not felt far otherwise disposed, they had luckily a complete excuse for their non-appearance in the deplorable state of the weather.

Having drawn up opposite the Hall door, it was opened by Mr. Griffiths, the steward, with a sad, but a most respectful look and manner; and in the same way might be characterized some six or seven servants standing behind him, in readiness to receive the new-comers. The half-drowned musicians tried to strike up "Rule, Britannia," as the hero of the day, Mr. Titmouse, descended from his carriage, Mr. Griffiths holding an umbrella for him, and bounded out of the rain with a hop, step, and a jump into the Hall, where the first words he was heard to utter were:

"What a devilish rum old place!"

"God bless you! God bless you! God bless you, Titmouse!" exclaimed old Mr. Quirk, grasping him by the hand as soon as he had entered. Titmouse shook hands with Miss Quirk, who immediately followed a female servant to an apartment, being exceedingly nervous and agitated. Gammon seemed a little out of spirits, and said simply, "You know, Titmouse, how fervently *I* congratulate you."

"Oh! my dear boy Tit, do, for Heaven's sake, if you want the thunder and lightning to cease, order those wretched devils off—send them anywhere, but do stop their cursed noise, my dear boy!" exclaimed Mr. Yahoo, as soon as he had entered, putting his fingers to his ears.

"Mr. what's-your-name," said Titmouse, addressing Mr. Griffiths, "I'll trouble you to order off those fellows and their infernal noise. Demme! there's a precious row making up above, and surely *one at a time!*"

"Ah, ha, capital joke, by Jove! capital!" said Mr. Fitz-Snooks.

"Ah—Titmouse—by Jupiter!" said Mr. Yahoo, as, twirling his fingers about in his long black hair, of which he seemed very proud, he glanced about the Hall, "this a'n't so much amiss! Do you know, my dear boy, I rather like it; it's substantial, antique, and so forth."

By this time the Hall was crowded with the gentlemen who had formed part of the procession, and who came bow-

"What a devilish rum old place!"

ing and scraping to Titmouse, congratulating him, and wishing him health and happiness. As soon as he could disengage himself from their flattering but somewhat troublesome civilities, his valet came and whispered, "Will you dress, sir! All is ready," and Titmouse followed him to the dressing-room, which had formerly been young Mrs. Aubrey's. In about an hour's time he had completed his toilet and was ushered into the drawing-room, which, as well as the dining-room, was ready prepared for the banquet, forty or fifty covers being laid in the two rooms, and good substantial fare for at least as many more, in the servants' hall, where operations had already commenced.

On entering the drawing-room, his appearance seemed to produce a great sensation, and after a little pause the only county gentleman who was present advanced and introduced himself, his wife, and daughter. This was Sir Harkaway Wildfire, Baronet, a tall and somewhat corpulent man of about fifty, very choleric and overbearing, his countenance showing the hard life he had led. He had been a bitter political opponent of Mr. Aubrey, and had once been a member for the county, but he had so crippled his resources by hunting and horse-racing as to compel the sacrifice of his seat in the House and Lady Wildfire's box at the opera. Sir Harkaway had an eye to the borough of Yatton on the happening of the next election, as soon as he had obtained an inkling that the new proprietor of Yatton was a very weak young man; and hence his patronizing presence at Yatton, in consequence of the invitation respectfully conveyed to him in Mr. Titmouse's name, through Messrs. Bloodsuck and Son, the local agents of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap.

Besides Lady Wildfire and her daughter there were about a dozen ladies, the wives of the gentlemen who had borne so distinguished a part in the triumphal procession. They looked rather a queer set, and none of them dared to speak either to Lady Wildfire or her daughter till spoken to by them. Never had old Yatton beheld within its walls so motley a group. By such guests, however, were the two principal tables crowded on this joyous occasion, and about half-past six o'clock the feast commenced, and a feast it certainly was, both elegant and substantial, nothing having been spared that money could procure.

Merriment echoed uproariously from all parts of the old Hall, and Mr. Titmouse was universally declared to be a very fine fellow, and likely to become by far the most popular man in the county. The Reverend Mr. Fleshpot said grace, and the Reverend Mr. Mudflint returned thanks; and shortly afterward Sir Harkaway arose, and, his eye fixed firmly on the adjoining borough, and also on the jolly table which promised to be ever opened to him at Yatton, he proposed the health of the distinguished proprietor of Yatton, in certainly a somewhat fulsome strain. The toast was received with the utmost enthusiasm; the gentlemen shouted and jingled their glasses on the table, while the ladies waved their handkerchiefs; indeed the scene was one of such overpowering excitement that Miss Quirk burst into tears, overcome by her emotions. Mr. Gammon, who sat next to Titmouse, assured him that it was absolutely necessary for him to make a speech to the company in acknowledgment of the compliment which had just been paid him.

"I shall put my foot in it—by jingo I shall! You must help me!" he whispered to Mr. Gammon, in an agony of trepidation and a mist of confusion, as he rose from his chair, being welcomed in the most enthusiastic manner by applause of every kind, lasting for several minutes. At length, when the noise had subsided into a fearful silence he stammered out, prompted incessantly by Mr. Gammon, something exceedingly like the following, if, indeed, he did not use these very words:

"Mr.—I beg pardon—*Sir* Hark—away, and gentlemen—gentlemen and ladies, am most uncommon, monstrous—particular happy to—to—(eh? *what* d'ye say, Mr. Gammon?) see you all here—at this place—here—at Yatton."—(*Applause.*) "Ladies and gentlemen—I say—hem!—unaccustomed as"—(*much applause*, during which Titmouse stooped and whispered to Gammon, "Curse me if I can catch a word you say!") "Happy and proud to see you all here—at Yatton—home of my ancestry—known to you all—centuries. Enjoyed yourselves, I hope—(*great applause*)—and hope you'll often come and do the same—(*still greater applause*). Particular glad to see the ladies (*applause*)—often heard of the beauties of Yatton—never believed it—no—beg pardon, mean I now see them—(*applause*). Am fond of horses—(*applause*)

—racing, hunting, and all that." (Here Sir Harkaway, extending his hand, publicly shook that of the eloquent speaker.

"Sorry to turn out the—the—old bird—but—nest not *his*—mine all the while—(*emotion*)—bear him no ill-will—(*applause*). Political principles—(*profound silence*) good old Whig principles—(*loud applause*)—rights of the people—religious liberty and all that—(*vociferous applause*)—found at my post in the hour of danger—enemy stole a march on me—(*great laughter and applause*). Won't detain you—ladies and gentlemen—drink your good healths, and many happy returns of the day."

Down sat Mr. Titmouse, exhausted with his maiden speech, and quite overpowered, moreover, by the extraordinary applause with which he was greeted at its conclusion. In due course, many other toasts were drunk. Dancing was now loudly called for; and the hall was speedily prepared for it. By this time, however, it was past eleven o'clock: the free potations of all the men, and indeed of more than one of the ladies, were beginning to tell, and the noise and confusion were very great. Scenes ensued which really baffle description. Mr. Titmouse, of course, drank a great quantity of wine, altho Mr. Gammon never left his side, and checked him fifty times when he was about to fill his glass: and the excitement produced by wine will, I trust, in some measure, mitigate the reader's indignation at hearing of a little incident which occurred, in which Titmouse was concerned, and which, about half-past three or four o'clock in the morning, served to bring that brilliant entertainment to a somewhat abrupt and rather unpleasant termination. Scarcely knowing where he was or what he was about, I am sorry to say, that while standing, as well as he could, beside Miss Wildfire, to dance for the fifth time with her—a plump, fair-faced good-natured girl of about nineteen or twenty—he suddenly threw his arms around her, and imprinted half a dozen kisses on her forehead, lips, cheek, and neck before she could recover from the confusion into which this extraordinary assault had thrown her.

Her faint shriek reached her father's ears, while he was in a distant part of the room, persecuting Miss Quirk with his drunken and profligate impertinences. Hastily approaching the quarter whence his daughter's voice had issued, he beheld

her just extricated from the insolent embrace of the half-unconscious Titmouse, and greatly agitated. With flaming eye and outstretched arm, he approached his unfortunate

little host and seizing hold of his right ear almost wrung it out of his head, Titmouse quite shrieking with the pain it occasioned. Still retaining his hold, uttering the while most

fearful imprecations, he gave him three violent kicks upon the seat of honor, the last of which sent him spinning into the arms of old Mr. Quirk, who was hurrying up to his relief, and who fell flat on the floor with the violent concussion. Then Miss Quirk rushed forward and screamed; a scene of dreadful confusion ensued; and at length the infuriated and half-drunken baronet, forced away by his wife and his daughter, quitted the Hall, and got into his carriage, uttering fearful threats and curses all the way home; without once adverting to the circumstance, of which also Lady Wildfire and her daughter were not aware, that he had been himself engaged in perpetrating the very same kind of misconduct which he had so severely and justly punished in poor Titmouse.

About half-past four o'clock, the sun rose in cloudless splendor, the air cleared, and all nature seemed freshened after the storm of the preceding day; but what a scene was presented at Yatton! Two or three persons, one with his hat off, asleep; another grasping a half-empty bottle; and a third in a state of desperate indisposition, were to be seen, at considerable distances from each other, by the side of the carriage-road leading down to the park gates. Candles and lamps were still burning and glimmering in some of the rooms; and in the servants' hall there were some dozen or so, who, having awoke from a deep sleep, were calling for more ale, or wine, or whatever else they could get. Some of the old family servants had fled hours ago from scenes of such unwonted riot, to their bedrooms, and, having locked and barricaded the doors, had gone to sleep. Mr. Griffiths sat in an old arm-chair in the library, the picture of misery; he had been repeatedly abused and insulted during the night, and had fled thither unable to bear the sight of the disgusting revelry that was everywhere around going forward. In short, at every point that caught the eye were visible the evidences of the villainous debauchery that had prevailed for the last seven hours, and which, under the Titmouse dynasty, was likely to prevail at all times thereafter.

As for Mr. Titmouse, half stunned with the treatment he had experienced at the hands of Sir Harkaway, he had been carried to bed—to the late bedroom of Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey —where, his excessive and miscellaneous and long-continued

potations aiding the effect of the serious injuries which he had sustained, he lay sprawling on the bed, half-undressed, in a truly deplorable condition. Mr. Glister, who had been summoned to his bedside upward of an hour before, sat now nodding in his chair beside his patient. Some three hours before, Gammon had fled from the scene, in disgust and alarm, to his bedroom, but, unable to sleep—not, however, from excess of wine, for he had drunk but a very few glasses—had risen about four o'clock, and was at that moment wandering slowly, with folded arms and downcast countenance, up and down the fine avenue of elm-trees.

Titmouse, assisted by his attentive valet, made a desperate attempt to get up and present himself the next day at dinner. Aided by a glass of pretty strong brandy and water, he at length got through the fatiguing duties of the toilet, and entered the drawing-room, where his traveling companions were awaiting his arrival—dinner being momentarily expected to be announced. He was deadly pale; his knees trembled; his eyes could not bear the light; and everything seemed in undulating motion around him, as he sank in silent exhaustion on the sofa. After a few minutes' continuance, he was compelled to leave the room, leaning on Gammon's arm, who conducted him to his bedroom, and left him in charge of his valet, who got him again into bed, where he lay enduring much agony (Dr. Goddart being sent for), while his friends were enjoying themselves at dinner.

Snap had set off the ensuing day for town, by the first coach, but old Mr. Quirk would have continued at Yatton until something definite had been done by Titmouse, in two matters which absorbed all the thoughts of the old gentleman —his daughter and the *Ten Thousand Pounds* bond. Miss Quirk, however, intense as was her anxiety to become the affianced bride of Titmouse and the mistress of the delightful domain where at present she dwelt only as a guest and in a very embarrassing position, was not so blind to all perception of womanly delicacy as to prolong her stay at Yatton, and at length prevailed upon her father to take their departure on the day but one after that on which they had arrived. Mr. Titmouse was sufficiently recovered to be present at the departure of Miss Quirk, who regarded his interesting and languid looks with an eye of melting sym-

pathy and affection. With half a smile and half a tear, she slipped into his hand, as he led her to the chaise, a little sprig of heart's-ease, which he at once stuck into the button-hole of his coat.

"'Pon my soul—must you go? Devilish sorry you can't stay to have seen some fun!—The old gent (meaning her

A little sprig of hearts ease

father) don't quite seem to like it—he, he!" said he in a low tone: then he handed her into the chaise, she dropping her veil to conceal the starting tear of mingled disappointment and desire and disgust, and they drove off, Titmouse kissing his hand to her as he stood upon the steps—as soon as they

were out of sight, however, exchanging a very significant smile with Mr. Gammon.

The next day Titmouse rose about ten o'clock, almost entirely recovered from his indisposition. Accompanied by Mr. Yahoo and Mr. Fitz-Snooks, with whom he was conversing as to the course he should take with reference to Sir Harkaway—whom, however, they advised him to treat with silent contempt, as he, Titmouse, was clearly in the wrong—he took a stroll about noon, down the path leading to the park gates.

"By jingo, surely here comes a parson," quoth Titmouse. "What the d——l can he want with me?" 'Twas Dr. Tatham who slowly approached them dressed in his Sunday suit and leaning on his old-fashioned walking-stick, given him many, many years ago by the deceased Mrs. Aubrey.

"Let's have some sport," said Fitz-Snooks.

"We must look devilish serious—no grinning till the proper time," said Yahoo.

"Hallo—you, sir!" commenced Titmouse, "who are you?" Dr. Tatham took off his hat, bowed, and was passing on.

"*Devilish* cool, upon—my—soul—sir!" said Titmouse, staring impudently at the worthy little doctor, who seemed to be taken quite by surprise.

"My worthy old gentleman," said Yahoo, with mock respect, "are you aware who it was that asked you a question?"

"I am not, sir," replied Dr. Tatham quietly.

"My name is Tittlebat Titmouse, at your service—and you are now in my grounds," said Titmouse, approaching him with an impudent air.

"*Have* I really the honor to address Mr. Titmouse?" inquired Dr. Tatham, somewhat incredulously.

"Why, 'pon my life, I *think* so, unless I'm changed lately; and by Jove, sir—*now*, who are you?"

"I am Dr. Tatham, sir, the Vicar of Yatton; I *had* intended calling at the Hall to offer my compliments; but I fear I am intruding——"

"Devil a bit—no, 'pon honor, no! you're a very good old fellow, I don't doubt—is that little church outside, yours?"

"It is, sir," replied Dr. Tatham seriously and sternly, his manner completely abashing the presumptuous little coxcomb who addressed him.

"Oh—well—I—I—'pon my soul, happy to see you, sir—you'll find something to eat in the Hall, I dare say——"

"Do you preach in that same little church of yours next Sunday?" inquired Mr. Yahoo, whose gross countenance filled Dr. Tatham with unspeakable aversion.

"I preach there *every* Sunday, sir, twice," he replied, gravely and distantly.

"I preach there every Sunday"

"You see, sir," lisped Fitz-Snooks, "the prayers are so—so —*devilish* long and tiresome—if you could—eh?—shorten 'em a little——"

Dr. Tatham slowly turned away from them, and, disregarding their calls to him, tho their tone of voice was greatly altered, walked back again toward the gate, and quitted the park, for the first time in his life, with feelings of mortal repugnance.

The next day was the Sabbath, tranquil and beautiful; and

just as the little tinkling bell of Yatton Church had ceased, Dr. Tatham rose, in his reading-desk, and commenced the prayers. The church was quite full, for every one was naturally anxious to catch a glimpse of the new tenants of the Squire's pew. It was empty, however, till about five minutes after the service had commenced, when a gentleman walked slowly up to the church door, and, having whispered an inquiry of the old pew-opener which was the Squire's pew, she led him into it. 'Twas, of course, Gammon, who behaved with the greatest seriousness and reverence throughout the service, paying marked attention to the sermon.

Gammon was an unbeliever, but he thought Dr. Tatham an amiable and learned enthusiast, who was most probably in earnest; and he felt disposed to admit, as his eye glanced round the attentive and decent congregation, that the sort of thing was not without its advantages. Almost all present took him for Titmouse, and watched every turn of his countenance with intense interest; and, in their simplicity, they rejoiced that Mr. Aubrey's successor was, at all events, so grave and respectable-looking a man.

About the middle of the service the doors of the church being wide open, the congregation beheld three gentlemen smoking, laughing, and talking together, approaching the porch. They stopped when within a few yards of the church and, after whispering together for a moment, one of them, having expelled a mouthful of smoke, stepped forward to the door, holding his cigar in one hand, and with the other taking off his hat. There was a faint smirk on his face, till he beheld Dr. Tatham's solemn eye fixed upon him, while he made a momentary pause. Titmouse blushed scarlet, made a hesitating but most respectful bow, and, stepping back a few paces, replaced his hat on his head, and lit his cigar from that of Mr. Fitz-Snooks, within view, perhaps unconsciously, of more than half the congregation. Then the three gentlemen, after Mr. Titmouse had spoken a word or two to them, burst out into a laugh and quitted the churchyard.

CHAPTER XVIII

GIVES THE DETAILS OF A MOST DECISIVE DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE INGENUOUS AUBREY AND THE INSINUATING GAMMON

On their arrival in London after vacating Yatton for Mr. Titmouse, the unfortunate Aubreys drove to a quiet family hotel in a retired street running parallel with Piccadilly; they were all wearied, both in mind and body, and after a very slight repast, and much anxious and desponding conversation, they bade each other affectionate adieus and retired to rest. They rose in the morning refreshed with repose, and in a much more tranquil mood of mind than could have been expected.

"Now, we enter," said Aubrey, with a cheerful smile, "upon the real business of life; so we must discard sentiment—we must think not of the past, but the future."

Shortly after breakfast, Mr. Aubrey, accompanied, at their request, by his wife and sister, went to the house agent, who had been commissioned by Mr. Runnington to look out two or three residences such as, on their arrival in town, they might easily select from. One was particularly recommended to them; and after due inquiry, within three days after their arrival in town, they engaged it. 'Twas a small, but convenient, airy, and comfortable house, within five minutes' walk of Hyde Park, and situated in Vivian Street—a recent street—and as quiet and retired as they could have wished. The rent, too, was moderate—fifty pounds a year. Tho none of the houses in the street were large, they were all strictly private residences, and had an air of thorough respectability. Within a week's time, their luggage, furniture, etc., had arrived in town from Yatton; and the Aubreys had quite sufficient to furnish their little residence out of the wreck of the furniture and equipments of the Old Hall. When Mrs. Aubrey and Miss Aubrey came to fetch Mr. Aubrey out of his study to witness the comple-

tion of their labors, he gazed round him, looked at each object, and then at the two dear, fond beings standing beside him, awaiting his opinion with womanly eagerness; but he could not express his feelings. His study, tho *very* small, was as snug and comfortable as a bookworm could desire. All the sides were covered with books, and in the middle were the library-table and armchair which he had used in Grosvenor Street, and which were certainly on too large a scale for the little room to which they had been removed.

Mr. Aubrey resolved to live in strict privacy; and they communicated their residence to but one or two of their numerous friends, and to them only in confidence. But it is time that I should proceed to give a more particular account of the position, the personal feelings, and purposes and prospects of Mr. Aubrey. The BAR was the profession to which his tastes and inclinations, and, he hoped, his qualifications pointed him. He wrote to the Attorney-General, soliciting an interview upon the subject of entering the profession; and received an immediate answer, appointing ten o'clock on Saturday, on which day the Attorney-General expected to be free from public engagements. Precisely at that hour, Mr. Aubrey entered the chambers of that distinguished person.

The Attorney-General was a tall and handsome man, about forty-five, with an extremely graceful and gentlemanlike carriage—a slight dash of negligence in it. His manner was fraught with cheerful composure; there was a playful smile about his mouth; his ample forehead seemed unfurrowed by a wrinkle; and his bright, penetrating, hazel eyes seemed never the worse for wear with all the tens of thousands of brief-sheets on which they had traveled for the last twenty years.

"Ha—Aubrey—I'm a few minutes behindtime, I'm afraid! How are you?" said he with a cheerful air, grasping his saddened visitor by the hand. They were both quickly seated —and within a minute or two the Attorney-General had got the business of the visit. He approved entirely of Mr. Aubrey's coming to the bar, and strongly recommended him not to lose one day in entering upon the serious practical study of it; informing him that, as a university man, within

three years' time he would be eligible to be called to the bar. "I'll call you myself, Aubrey, if you will allow me," said he. "All that I can do for you, in every way, I will—command me! By the way," he added, assuming a somewhat anxious expression of countenance, "I'm almost afraid to ask; but how do you come on, about the—mesne profits?"

"I have heard nothing whatever about them as yet," replied Aubrey, sighing; his face suddenly overshadowed with gloom. A moment's pause ensued, which was interrupted by the Attorney-General saying, in a very earnest and feeling manner, "I hope to God you'll be able to get some favorable arrangement made! You've not seen anything of Mr. Titmouse's attorneys, I suppose?"

"Oh, no! nor heard anything from them."

"I've had very little to do with them: Quirk, Gammon, and Snap—these are the people, eh?" Mr. Aubrey nodded. "Quirk is a stubborn, wooden-headed fellow—an old hedgehog! Egad! that man's compounded more felonies, the old scamp, than any man in England! I should like to have him in the witness-box for a couple of hours or so! I think I'd tickle him a little," said the Attorney-General, with a bitter smile. "They say he's a confidential adviser to a sort of thieves' association. But there's Gammon: I've had several things to do with *him*. He is a superior man, that Gammon; a very superior man. A keen dog! Have you seen Mr. Gammon?"

"No, I've had no occasion."

"He has a pleasing, gentlemanlike appearance; rather a striking face. *He's* the man you'll have to deal with in any negotiations on the subject I named. You mustn't think me intrusive, Aubrey, but, have they sent in their bill yet?"

Mr. Aubrey involuntarily shuddered, as he answered in the negative.

"I'd give a trifle to know how the plague such people ever came to be concerned in such a case. By the way, what an inconceivably ridiculous little ass that Titmouse is—I saw him in court at York. If he'd only go on the stage, and act *naturally*, he'd make his fortune as a fool!" Mr. Aubrey faintly smiled at this sally; but the topics which the Attorney-General had just before touched upon had not a little oppressed his spirits.

"As this is comparatively an idle day with me," said the Attorney-General, "and I've got ten minutes more at your service—suppose I go with you at once—nothing like the

present moment—to Mr. Weasel's, in whose chambers I wish you to begin your studies?"

"I am greatly obliged to you," replied Aubrey, and both rose to go.

Arriving at Mr. Weasel's the Attorney-General came to the point in about half a minute, and the matter was very quickly settled; it being arranged that within a day or two's time, as soon as the forms necessary for admitting Mr. Aubrey to an Inn of Court should have been completed, he should commence his attendance at Mr. Weasel's, from ten o'clock till five, daily.

A little fatigued and harassed by several important matters, which kept him engaged till a late hour in the afternoon, he reached Vivian Street in a depressed and desponding mood. Yet every day knit that little family together, if possible, in stronger bonds of love; for they clung to each other with a feeling of having been thrust out of the great gay world together, and sent, as it were, upon a pilgrimage afar, amid scenes of increasing gloom, difficulty, and danger. They were very happy in one another's company; their house, though small, was convenient and comfortable; they had health; Mr. Aubrey had constant exercise for an active and vigorous mind in the acquisition of the learning of a noble profession, the practise of which might possibly hereafter raise all of them even to affluence and distinction—at all events, would secure them the substantial comforts of life.

They were sitting one morning at their usual early and simple breakfast, when a knock at the door announced a visitor, who proved to be Mr. Runnington. Why it was, they hardly knew; but they all slightly changed color. He had called so early, he said, to insure seeing Mr. Aubrey before he went to the Temple. As soon as he had retired with Mr. Aubrey to the study, in a low tone he informed Mr. Aubrey that, the evening before, Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's BILL had come in.

"What is the *amount* of it, then?" inquired Mr. Aubrey, dreading to hear the answer; while Mr. Runnington took out of his pocket-book a slip of paper, which he handed to Mr. Aubrey, and on which the latter read—"£3,946 14s. 6d." He gazed at it for some moments in silence and became very pale.

"This is a very—large—amount," said he at length.

"It is a most serious affair," replied Mr. Runnington.

"Will you also oblige me by saying what is the probable amount of *your* bill?" inquired Mr. Aubrey, with a calmness which seemed lent to him by despair.

"Why—perhaps I am hardly doing right in mentioning it;

but whenever our bill is sent in, it will be less by some six hundred and fifty pounds, by the noble generosity of the Attorney-General, who has returned all his fees——"

"Returned all his fees!" echoed Mr. Aubrey, starting. He exquisitely appreciated the conduct of his distinguished friend, and at the same time felt a totally new and very painful sense of pecuniary obligation.

"I feel, Mr. Aubrey, that I have broken my promise to the Attorney-General, who extracted from me a solemn pledge that you should never know it. What is it, after all—noble as it is—to the Attorney-General, with his £12,000 or £15,000 a year?"

"Oh—do not talk *so*, Mr. Runnington; I am overpowered, oppressed. Never in all my life have I experienced feelings like those with which I am now agitated. How much does that leave me your debtor?"

"Why—really it is hard to say, unprepared—I should imagine some £1,500 or £1,600—about which——"

"Then there is Mr. Parkinson's," said Aubrey in a low tone, but with a desperate air; presently adding: "Here are some £6,000 or £7,000 to start with; and *then* we come to the mesne profits—gracious, gracious God!" he suddenly added with a visible shudder. He folded his arms convulsively, and gazed for a second or two at Mr. Runnington, with an eye whose expression was overpowering.

As soon as he had recovered his self-command he quitted the house arm in arm with Mr. Runnington. As they walked along Mr. Runnington told Mr. Aubrey that he considered Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's bill to be extortionate, and that it might, on taxation—a process which he explained to Mr. Aubrey—be reduced, probably, by at least *one-half*. But he also reminded Mr. Aubrey of the power which they held in their hands in respect of the mesne profits, and intimated his opinion that they had made out their bill with an eye to such considerations—namely, that it should be discharged without rigorous scrutiny into its constituent items, before they would listen to any terms whatever for the payment of the mesne profits; and that Mr. Aubrey's position with respect to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap was one which required the greatest possible deliberation and circumspection on his part, especially in the matter of the bill.

"I see!" said Mr. Aubrey. "The whole comes to this: they will relieve me from liability to Mr. Titmouse for as much of what may be due to him as they can divert into their own pockets!"

"That certainly seems very much like it," replied Mr. Runnington, shrugging his shoulders; "but you will leave all such matters to us, and rely on our honor and our discretion. We know the kind of people we have to deal with. Mr. Titmouse is likely to be merely a puppet in their hands—at least in those of Mr. Gammon, with whom, I have no doubt, our negotiations will have to be carried on."

"Why should I disguise anything from you, Mr. Runnington?" said Aubrey. "I have a little family plate, which I could not bear to part with; my books; and the remnants of the furniture at Yatton, which I have saved in order to furnish our present residence. Besides this there is a sum of about £3,000 in the funds, and £423 at my banker's. Those are my circumstances; they appal me merely in stating them: —Why, I owe double the sum I have named, for lawyers' bills only. I have not enough, without parting with my books and plate, to discharge even Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's bill!"

"It would be cruel and absurd in me not to express at once, Mr. Aubrey, my conviction that your situation is fearfully critical; and that your sole hope is in the treatment which may be expected from Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, and their client, Mr. Titmouse. Serious as are, at present, your other liabilities—to that one, they are but as a bucket of water to the Thames. As we are talking, Mr. Aubrey, in this candid and unrestrained manner, I will tell you my chief source of apprehension on your account with reference to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap: namely, that they may possibly speculate on your being able, if placed in real peril, to call around you, in your extremity, a host of wealthy and powerful friends—as security, or otherwise——"

"They will find themselves, then, utterly mistaken. If they and their client are really capable of such shocking brutality, let them do their worst; I am resigned. Providence will find out a shelter for my wife and children and my sister; and as for myself, rather than satiate the rapacity of such

wretches by plundering good-natured and generous friends, I will end my days in prison."

Mr. Runnington, however, hoped that it would not come to such an issue. He consoled Mr. Aubrey with assurances that, as for their own demand, it might stand over for several years: and that so, he was sure, would it be with the demand of Mr. Parkinson. If, by a great effort, sufficient funds could be raised to discharge promptly the bill of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, he felt sure that some favorable arrangement respecting the amount and mode of payment of the mesne profits might be effected—leaving Mr. Aubrey, in the mean time, leisure to apply himself vigorously to his studies for the bar, for which Mr. Runnington assured him that he considered him peculiarly qualified.

On Mr. Aubrey's return home to dinner, he found that his sister had received a long letter from Dr. Tatham, to which was appended a postscript mentioning Mr. Gammon in such terms as suggested to Mr. Aubrey to seek an interview with Mr. Gammon, who, Dr. Tatham stated, had quitted Yatton for town. For that purpose he quitted Mr. Weasel's at the early hour of three o'clock, and straightway bent his steps to Saffron Hill. Mr. Aubrey entered the hall and made his way into the clerk's room.

"Now, sir, your business?" asked a showily dressed youth, lolling at a desk.

"Is Mr. Gammon within?" inquired Mr. Aubrey.

"Mr. Gammon is in his room, sir, and alone. I believe he is rather busy—I've no doubt you can see him."

The fact was that at that moment Mr. Gammon was engaged in drawing up "Instructions to prepare Declarations" in an action of mesne profits against Mr. Aubrey! That morning a long discussion had taken place between Mr. Quirk and Mr. Gammon on the subject. Mr. Quirk was for making short work of it—for "going straight ahead"—and getting the whole £60,000 or security for the greater portion, and £20,000 down. Gammon was of opinion that, by attempting to proceed to extremities against Mr. Aubrey, they could not fail of drawing down on themselves and their client universal execration; and, moreover, by driving Mr. Aubrey desperate, would force him either to quit the country or accept the protection of the insolvent laws. He had, at length,

satisfied Mr. Quirk that their only chance was in gentleness and moderation. Gammon had as keen a desire and as firm a determination as Quirk to wring out of their wretched victim the very last farthing that there was the slightest probability of obtaining; for Titmouse had pointed to that quarter for the discharge of his ten-thousand-pound bond to the firm, and also of their bill of costs to him, saying that twenty, or at least fifteen thousand pounds, were to be handed over to himself, and all the rest that could be got, Mr. Gammon might appropriate to his own use.

Gammon's inquiries into Mr. Aubrey's circumstances convinced him that it would be impossible to extract any considerable sum from that unfortunate gentleman; and that if the firm could contrive to get their bill paid, and perhaps obtain substantial security for four or five thousand of the mesne profits, and Aubrey's own personal security for the payment of any portion of the remainder hereafter, they had better rest satisfied, and look for liquidation of their heavy claim against Titmouse to a mortgage upon the Yatton estates. Mr. Gammon had also proposed to himself certain other objects in dealing with Mr. Aubrey than the mere extraction of money from him. In short, prompted by considerations such as those above intimated, he had come to the determination, an hour or so before Mr. Aubrey's most unexpected visit, at once to set in motion legal proceedings for the recovery of mesne profits.

"Have I the honor to address Mr. Gammon?" commenced Mr. Aubrey courteously.

"Sir, my name is Gammon," he replied, with an expression of very great surprise—"I believe I have the honor of seeing Mr. Aubrey?—I beg you will allow me to offer you a chair."

"I dare say you can guess the occasion of my visit, Mr. Gammon," continued Mr. Aubrey, seating himself.

Mr. Gammon bowed, with an anxious, expectant air.

"I allude to the question yet remaining between your client, Mr. Titmouse, and me—the mesne profits. To me it is a matter of life and death. It is pressing me almost to the verge of madness!"

"Do not, Mr. Aubrey," said Gammon, in a tone and with a look which touched the heart of his agitated visitor, "magnify the mischief. What is there to stand in the way

of an amicable adjustment of these claims? If I had my way, Mr. Aubrey, I would write sixty thousand farthings for sixty thousand pounds!"

"You have named the sum for which I believe I am legally liable to Mr. Titmouse," said Mr. Aubrey with forced composure; "it is a sum as completely out of my power to pay, or secure—even a quarter of it—as to give him one of the stars."

"I am aware, Mr. Aubrey, that you must have had many calls upon you, which must have temporarily crippled your resources——"

"Temporarily!" echoed Mr. Aubrey with a sickening smile.

"I devoutly trust that it is only temporarily! For your own and family's sake," he added quickly, observing the watchfulness with which his every look and word were regarded by his visitor. "Any proposal which you may think proper to make, I am ready—eager—to receive and consider in a liberal spirit. I repeat, if you had *me* only to deal with —you would leave this room with a lightened heart; but to be plain and candid, our client, Mr. Titmouse, is a very difficult person to deal with. I pledge my word of honor to you [*O Gammon! Gammon!*] that I have repeatedly urged upon Mr. Titmouse to release you from all the rents received by you previously to your receiving legal notice of the late proceedings. I am bound to say, however, as the law now stands—if Mr. Titmouse should, contrary to my advice, determine to stand upon his strict rights——" Gammon paused, and looked with melancholy significance at Mr. Aubrey.

"I am entirely at his mercy! I understand. I do trust, however, that in the name of our common humanity he will have some consideration for the helpless situation in which I am so unexpectedly placed," said Aubrey, with mournful energy. "Never having imagined it necessary to save money—if my miserable remnant of means *be* so appropriated, we are *literally beggars*." He paused, and his voice faltered.

"Indeed—indeed, you distress me beyond measure, Mr. Aubrey," said Gammon in a low tone.

"If you can but secure me a merciful interval, to prepare myself for the profession which I have entered—the bar—whatever earnings I might obtain, after saving a bare main-

tenance for myself and family, shall be devoted faithfully to liquidate the heavy claims upon me! Sir, by every consideration which may influence a gentleman, I conjure you to interfere between me and utter immediate ruin!"

This was the real thrilling language of the heart; but it failed to produce any impression upon Gammon, exciting only intense chagrin and disappointment. These feelings, however, he did not express. "Oh, that it were but in my power," said he, with great energy, "to send you out of this room a free man! If I alone were to be consulted I would instantly absolve you from all demands—or at least give you your own time, and take no other security than your honor."

("Here's a kettle of fish," thought Gammon to himself, and bending down his head, he covered his eyes with his hands; "worse, far worse than I had suspected. I would take five pounds for all my residuary interest in the sixty thousand pounds! I've not the least doubt that he's speaking the truth. But the *bill* part of the business is highly unsatisfactory! Surely Mr. Aubrey must be able to get security? With such friends and connections as his!—if one could only get them to join him in security for ten thousand pounds—stay—that won't exactly do, either; I must have my thumb upon him.")

"I am so profoundly affected by the situation in which you are placed, Mr. Aubrey," said Gammon, at length appearing to have subdued his emotion, and feeling it necessary to say something, "that I think I may take upon myself to say the instructions which we have received shall not be acted upon, come what may. Those must be really monsters, not men, who could press upon one in your position; and that such should be attempted by one who has succeeded to your former advantages is inconceivably shocking. Mr. Aubrey, *you shall not be crushed* so long as I have any influence with Mr. Titmouse." There was a warmth, an energy in Gammon's manner while saying this, which cheered poor Mr. Aubrey. "What I am about to say, Mr. Aubrey, is in complete confidence," continued Gammon in a low tone. "There are serious difficulties in the way of serving you. Mr. Titmouse is a weak and inexperienced young man, naturally excited to a great pitch by his present eleva-

"I've not the least doubt that he's speaking the truth."

tion, and already embarrassed for want of ready money. You may imagine, sir, that his liabilities to us are of considerable magnitude. Our outlay has considerably crippled our pecuniary resources, and driven us to incur liabilities which are beginning to occasion us considerable anxiety. Of course, Mr. Aubrey, we must look to Mr. Titmouse to be speedily reimbursed: he insists upon our immediately calling upon you; and I have reason to suspect that he has at his elbow one or two very heartless advisers, who have suggested this course to him, for he follows it most pertinaciously. That he cannot meet the liabilities I have alluded to, out of his annual income, without swallowing it up entirely for eighteen months or two years, is certain. I regret to say that Mr. Quirk and Mr. Snap encourage his disposition to press you;—do not be alarmed, my dear sir!" he continued, observing the deadly paleness of Mr. Aubrey, whose eye was rivetted upon that of Gammon, "for I declare that I will stand between you and them, and it is enough for me to say that I have the power of doing so. I am the only person living who happens to possess the means of influencing Mr. Titmouse; and I am determined to avail myself of them. Now, bearing in mind that I have no legal authority from him, and am, at the same time, only one of a firm, and assuring you that I am entailing a serious responsibility upon myself in what I am doing, let me throw out for your consideration my general notion of what I think ought to be done."

"I perfectly understand; I listen with inexpressible anxiety," said Mr. Aubrey.

"Had I been consulted, we should have proposed to you, with reference to our bill (which I candidly acknowledge contains a much more liberal entry than would be allowed on taxation, and which is none of *my* doing)"—Gammon knew the credit for candor which he was likely to obtain with Mr. Aubrey by this acknowledgment of a fact of which Messrs. Runnington would quickly apprise him on looking at the bill—"I should have *proposed* to you the payment of our bill by instalments, during the next three or four years, provided you could have obtained partial security. But I am only one of three, and I know the determination of Mr. Quirk and Mr. Snap not to listen to any proposal

with reference to the mesne profits which is not based upon —in short, they say *the bill must be paid at once without being looked into.* Oh, let me disguise nothing from you, my dear sir, in a conversation of this kind between two gentlemen," continued Gammon, with an admirable air of frankness, for he perceived that Mr. Aubrey looked slightly staggered. "I am ashamed to acknowledge that that bill does contain exorbitant entries which have led to frequent and fierce disputes between me and my partners. But *what is to be done?* Mr. Quirk is the moneyed man of the firm; and if you were to glance at the articles of our partnership"—Gammon shrugged his shoulders and sighed—"you would see the tyrannical extent of power over his partners which, in virtue of that circumstance, he has secured! You observe how candid I am—perhaps foolishly so."

"Pray do not say so, Mr. Gammon; I fully appreciate your motives. I am devoured with anxiety for an intimation of the nature of the terms which you were so kindly about to specify."

"*Specify* is perhaps rather too strong a term—but to proceed. Supposing, Mr. Aubrey, the preliminary matter which I have alluded to, satisfactorily arranged, I am disposed to say that if you could find security for the payment of the sum of ten thousand pounds within a year, or a year and a half—" (Mr. Aubrey's teeth almost chattered at the mention of it)—"I—I—that is, *my* impression is—but it is only *mine*," added Gammon earnestly, "that the rest should be left to your own honor, you giving at the same time a personal undertaking to pay, at a future—a very distant day—in the manner most convenient to yourself—the sum of ten thousand pounds more—making in all only one-third of the sum due from you; and receiving an absolute release from Mr. Titmouse in respect of the remaining two-thirds, namely, forty thousand pounds."

Mr. Aubrey listened to all this with his faculties strung to the utmost pitch of intensity, and, when Gammon ceased, experienced a transient sense of relief.

"Have I made myself intelligible, Mr. Aubrey?" inquired Gammon with a kind, but serious air.

"Perfectly—but I feel so overwhelmed with the magnitude of the topics we are discussing that I scarcely at present

appreciate the position in which you would place me. I must throw myself entirely upon your indulgence!"

Gammon looked a little disappointed.

"I can imagine your feelings, sir," said he, as he took a sheet of paper and a pencil; and while he made a few memoranda of the arrangement which he had been mentioning, he continued: "You see—the great result of what I have been hastily sketching off is to give you ample time to pay the sums which I have named, and to relieve you, at once, *absolutely* from no less a sum than FORTY THOUSAND POUNDS," said he, with emphasis and deliberation, "for which—and with interest—you would otherwise remain liable to the day of your death;—there could be no escape—except, perhaps, into banishment, which with your feelings would be worse than death—for it would be a *dishonorable* exile, to avoid just liabilities—and those who bear your name would, in such an——"

"Pray, sir, be silent!" exclaimed Mr. Aubrey in a tone that electrified Gammon, who started from his chair. Mr. Aubrey's face was whitened; his eye glanced lightning at his companion. Dagon-like, Gammon had put forth his hand and touched the ark of Aubrey's honor. Gammon lost his color, and for, perhaps, the first time in his life quailed before the majesty of man.

"I am guilty of great weakness, sir," continued Mr. Aubrey, his excitement only a little abated. He stood erect and spoke with stern precision; "but you, perhaps unconsciously, provoked the display of it. Sir, I am ruined; I am a beggar; we are all ruined; we are all beggars: it is the ordering of God, and I bow to it. But do you presume, sir, to think that at last my HONOR is in danger? and consider it necessary, as if you were warning one whom you saw about to become a criminal, to expatiate on the nature of the meditated act by which I am to disgrace myself and my family?"

"This is a sally equally unexpected, Mr. Aubrey, and, permit me to add, unwarrantable," said Gammon calmly, having recovered his self-possession. "You have entirely misunderstood me; or I have ill explained myself. Suffer me to tell you that I feel an inexpressible respect for you, and am miserable at the thought of one word of mine having occasioned you an instant's uneasiness." By the time Gammon

had done speaking, Mr. Aubrey felt ashamed and mortified at himself, and conceived an admiration of the dignified forbearance of Gammon, which quickly heightened into respect for his general character, as it appeared to Aubrey, and fervent gratitude for the disposition which he had evinced, from first to last, so disinterestedly to serve a ruined man.

"As I am a man of business, Mr. Aubrey," said Gammon shortly afterward, with a captivating smile, "and this is a place of business, shall we resume our conversation? With reference to the first ten thousand pounds, it can be a matter of future arrangement as to the instruments by which its payment is to be secured; and as for the remaining ten thousand, if I were not afraid of rendering myself liable to Mr. Titmouse for neglecting his interests, I should be content with your verbal promise—your mere word of honor—to pay it, as and when you conveniently could. But, in justice to myself, I really must take a *show* of security from you. Say, for instance, two promissory notes, for five thousand pounds each, payable to Mr. Titmouse. You may really regard them as matters of mere form; for, when you shall have given them to me, they will be deposited *there*" (pointing to an iron safe), "and not again be heard of until you may have inquired for them. I tell you candidly that they must be *negotiable* in point of form; but I assure you that I will not permit them to be negotiated. *Now*, may I venture to hope we understand each other?" added Gammon, with a cheerful air, "and that this proposition will have the effect of relieving you from an immense load of anxiety and liability?"

"An immense—a crushing load, indeed, sir, if Providence shall enable me to perform *my* part of the arrangement, and if *you* have but power to carry your views into effect," replied Mr. Aubrey.

"Leave that to *me*, Mr. Aubrey; I will undertake to do it; and the more anxiously, for that I may thereby hope to establish a kind of set-off against the misery and loss which my professional exertions have contributed to occasion you!"

"I feel very deeply sensible of your unexpected kindness, Mr. Gammon; but still, the arrangement suggested is one which occasions me dreadful anxiety as to my being able to carry out my part of it."

"Never, never despair, Mr. Aubrey! Heaven helps those who help themselves; and I really imagine I see your powerful energies already beginning to surmount your prodigious difficulties! When you have slept over the matter, you will feel the full relief which this arrangement is so calculated to afford your spirits. Of course, too, you will lose no time in communicating to Messrs. Runnington the nature of the arrangement which I have proposed. I can predict that they will be not a little disposed to urge you to complete it."

"I will consult, as you suggest, sir, my professional advisers, and am strongly inclined to believe that they will feel as you predict. I am bound to consult *them*——"

"Oh, certainly! certainly! I am very strict in the observance of professional etiquette, Mr. Aubrey, I assure you; and should not think of going on with this arrangement, except with them acting on your behalf. One thing I have to beg, Mr. Aubrey, that either you or they will communicate the result of your deliberations to *me* personally. By the way, if you would favor me with your address, I shall make a point of calling at your house either late in the evening or early in the morning."

"I am infinitely obliged to you, sir—but it would be far more convenient for both of us if you could drop me a line, or favor me with a call at Mr. Weasel's, in Pomegranate Court in the Temple."

"As you like—as you like, Mr. Aubrey," replied Gammon, with difficulty concealing his feelings of pique and disappointment at losing the opportunity of a personal introduction to Mr. Aubrey's family. After a few words of general conversation they parted. It had been to Mr. Aubrey a memorable interview—and to Gammon a somewhat arduous affair, taxing to an unusual extent his powers of self-command and of dissimulation. As soon as he was left alone, his thoughts instantly recurred to Aubrey's singular burst of hauteur and indignation. Gammon had a stinging sense of submission to superior energy—and felt indignant with himself for not having resented it. Setting aside this source of exquisite irritation to the feelings of a proud man, he felt a depressing consciousness that he had not met with his usual success in his recent encounter with Mr. Aubrey, who

had been throughout cautious, watchful, and courteously distrustful. He had afforded occasional glimpses of the unapproachable pride of his nature—and Gammon had crouched. Was there anything in their interview—thought he, walking thoughtfully to and fro in his room—which, when Aubrey came to reflect upon—for instance, had Gammon disclosed too much about the extent of his influence over Titmouse? His cheek slightly flushed; a sigh of fatigue and excitement escaped him.

CHAPTER XIX

DISCLOSES THE RESTIVENESS OF THE HERO AT YATTON, THE FUTILITY OF HIS RESISTANCE, TOGETHER WITH OTHER PLEASANT MATTERS REGARDING HIS NEWLY BESTOWED FAME IN TOWN.

But I must return to Yatton, where some matters had transpired which are worth noticing. Tho Mr. Yahoo paid rather anxious court to Mr. Gammon, who was far too much for him in every way, 'twas plain that he dreaded and disliked the solicitor as much as he himself was despised by that gentleman. Mr. Gammon easily extracted from Titmouse that Yahoo was endeavoring, from time to time, artfully to set him against his protector, Mr. Gammon. This was *something;* but more than this—Yahoo, a bold, dashing scoundrel, was obtaining a growing ascendency over Titmouse, whom he was rapidly initiating into all manner of vile habits and practises, and, in short, completely corrupting. But, above all, Gammon ascertained that Yahoo had already commenced with great success his experiments upon the purse of Titmouse.

Before they had been a week at Yatton, down came a splendid billiard table with its appendages from London, accompanied by a man to fix it in the library. This room was quickly denuded of all traces of its former character, and here Yahoo, Titmouse, and Fitz-Snooks would pass a good deal of their time. Then they would have tables and chairs, and cards, cigars, and brandy and water out upon the lawn, and sit there for half a day together playing écarté, at once pleasantly soothed and stimulated by their cigars and brandy and water. Then Yahoo got up frequent excursions. to Grilston, and even to York; where together with his two companions he had "great sport," as the newspapers began to intimate with growing frequency and distinctness. Mr. Gammon conceived a fearful, a shuddering loathing and disgust for the miscreant leader into these enormities, so he

sent a letter up to Snap, desiring him to go to two or three money-lenders, and ascertain whether they had any paper by them with the name of "Yahoo" on it; and in the event of such being discovered, he was to act in the manner pointed out by Gammon.

Off went Snap like a shot, and the very first gentleman he applied to, viz., a Mr. SUCK'EM DRY, proved to be possessed of an acceptance of Yahoo's for two hundred pounds, for which Dry had given only five pounds on speculation. He readily yielded to Snap's representation, that he would give him—Dry—a shy at Mr. Yahoo gratis—and put the document into the hands of Snap; who forthwith delivered it, confidently, to Swindle Shark, gent., an attorney in Chancery Lane, into whose office the dirty work of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap was swept—in cases in which they did not choose to appear, and which were low, indeed.

Nothing could exceed the astonishment and concern with which Mr. Gammon, the evening but one afterward, on returning to the Hall from a ride to Grilston, heard Titmouse and Fitz-Snooks—deserted beings!—tell him how, an hour before, two big vulgar fellows, one of them with a long slip of paper in his hands, had called at the Hall, asked for the innocent unsuspecting Yahoo, and insisted on his accompanying them to the house of one of the bailiffs, and then to York Castle. They had brought a tax cart with them for his convenience; and into it, between his two new friends, was forced to get the astonished Yahoo—swearing oaths enough to last the whole neighborhood for a fortnight at least. Mr. Gammon was quite shocked at the indignity which had been perpetrated, and asked why the villains had not been kept till he could have been sent for.

As soon as the *York True Blue* had, amongst other imitations of fashionable movements, informed the public that "*The Hon.* Puppy Yahoo" had quitted Yatton Hall for York Castle, where he intended to remain and receive a large party of friends—it was astonishing how soon they began to muster and rally round him. "*Detainers*"—so that species of visiting cards is called—came fluttering in like snow; and, in short there was no end to the messages of civility and congratulation which he received from those whom he had obliged with his valuable countenance and custom.

Yahoo having been thus adroitly disposed of, Mr. Gammon had the gratification of finding that mischievous simpleton Fitz-Snooks very soon afterward take his departure. He pined for the pleasures of the town. As soon as poor Titmouse had bade him good-by, shaken hands with him, and lost sight of him, he was completely cowed and prostrate. He was at Yatton, *alone with Gammon*—and he felt as if a spell were upon him. He had no feeling of *ownership* of Yatton; but of being, as it were, only tenant-at-will thereof to Mr. Gammon. How was it? Mr. Gammon's manner toward him was most uncommonly respectful; what else could he wish for? Yet he would have given a thousand pounds to Mr. Gammon to take himself off, and never show his nose again at Yatton! At length Gammon broached the subject of their bill, and a frightful amount it was! There were the moneys advanced by Mr. Quirk, for his support for eight or nine months, on a liberal scale, which amounted to a sum infinitely larger than could have been supposed; and lastly, the bond for ten thousand pounds, as the just reward to the firm for their long-continued, most anxious, and successful exertions on Titmouse's behalf. Titmouse mustered up all his resolution as for a last desperate struggle; swore they were robbing him; and added, with a furious snap of the fingers, "they had better take the estate themselves—allow him a pound a week, and send him back to Tag-rag's." Then he burst into tears, and cried like a child, long and bitterly.

"Well, sir," said Gammon, after remaining silent for some time, looking at Titmouse calmly, but with an expression of face which frightened him out of his wits, "if this is to be really the way in which I am to be treated by you—I, the only *real disinterested* friend you have in the world—if my advice is to be spurned and my motives suspected; if your first and deliberate engagements to our firm are to be wantonly broken——"

"Ah, but, 'pon my soul I was humbugged into making them," said Titmouse passionately.

"Why, you little miscreant!" exclaimed Gammon, starting up in his chair, and gazing at him as if he would have scorched him with his eye, "do you dare to say so? If you have no gratitude—have you lost your *memory?* What

were you when I dug you out of your filthy hole at Closet Court? Did you not repeatedly go down on your knees to us? Did you not promise a thousand times to do infinitely more than you are now called upon to do? And is this, you despicable little insect!—is *this* the return you make us for putting you, a beggar—and very nearly too, an idiot——"

"You're most uncommon polite," said Titmouse, suddenly and bitterly.

"Silence, sir! I am in no humor for trifling!" interrupted Gammon, sternly. "I say, is *this* the return you think of making us; not only to insult us, but to refuse to pay money actually advanced by us to save you from starvation? Remember—remember, Tittlebat Titmouse," continued Gammon, in a low tone, and extending toward him threateningly his thin forefinger, "I who made you, will in one day—one single day—unmake you—will blow you away like a bit of froth; you shall never be seen or heard of, or thought of, except by some small draper whose unhappy shopman you may be!"

"Ah!—'pon my life! Dare say you think I'm uncommon frightened! Ah, ha! Monstrous—particular good!" said Titmouse.

Gammon perceived that he trembled in every limb; and the smile which he tried to throw into his face was so wretched that, had you seen him at that moment, and considered his position, much and justly as you now despise him, you must have pitied him. "You're always now going on in this way!—It's so very likely!" continued he. "Why, 'pon my soul, am not I to be A LORD one of these days? Can you help that? Can you send a LORD behind a draper's counter? 'Pon my soul, what do you say to that? I like that uncommon——"

"What do I say?" replied Gammon, calmly, "why, that I've a great mind to say and do something that would make you—make you—fit to jump head foremost into a sewer!"

Titmouse's heart was lying fluttering at his throat.

"Tittlebat, Tittlebat!" continued Gammon, dropping his voice, and speaking in a very kind and earnest manner, "if you did but know the extent to which an accident has placed you in my power! at this moment in my power! Really I almost tremble, myself, to think of it!" He rose, brought his chamber-candlestick out of the hall—lit it—bade Tit-

mouse good-night. "I may rid you of my presence to-morrow morning, Mr. Titmouse. I shall leave you to *try to enjoy Yatton!* May you find a *truer*—a more powerful friend than you will have lost in me!" Titmouse never shrunk more helplessly under the eye of Mr. Gammon than he did at that moment.

"I, who made you, will in one single day unmake you"

"You—you—*won't* stop and smoke another cigar with a poor devil, will you, Mr. Gammon?" he inquired faintly. "It's somehow—most uncommon lonely in this queer, large, old-fashioned——"

"Not to-night, thank you," replied Gammon—and with-

drew, leaving Titmouse in a state of mingled alarm and anger—the former, however, predominating.

"By jingo!" he at length exclaimed, with a heavy sigh, after a reverie of about three minutes, gulping down the remainder of his brandy and water. "If that same gent, Mr. Gammon, a'n't the—the—devil—he's the very best imitation of him that ever I heard tell of!"

The next morning the storm had entirely blown over. When they met at breakfast, Titmouse, as Gammon knew would be the case, was all submission and respect; in fact, he was evidently thoroughly frightened by what Gammon had said, and infinitely more by the *manner* in which he had said what he did say overnight. Gammon, however, preserved for some little time the haughty air with which he had met him: but a few words of poor Titmouse's expressing his regret for what he had said when he had drunk too much—poor little soul—overnight, and unqualifyingly submitting to every one of the requisitions which had been insisted on by Mr. Gammon—quickly dispersed the cloud that was settled on Gammon's brow.

"Now my dear sir," said he very graciously, "you show yourself the gentleman I always took you for—and I forget, forever, all that passed between us so unpleasantly last night. I am sure it will never be so again: for now we *entirely* understand each other?"

"Oh, yes—'pon my life—quite entirely!" replied Titmouse, meekly.

Soon after breakfast they adjourned at Gammon's request to the billiard-room; where they had the friendly conversation in which Titmouse made the suggestion we have already heard of, viz., that Gammon should immediately clap the screw upon Aubrey, with the view to squeezing out of him at least sufficient money to pay the ten thousand pound bond and their bill of costs immediately.

"I shall try to get it out of Mr. Aubrey," said Gammon, "and then out of another friend of yours. In the mean while we must not drop the Tag-rags just yet."

There was a visible alteration for the better in the state of things at Yatton as soon as Messrs. Yahoo and Fitz-Snooks had been disposed of. Now and then a few of the distinguished people who had honored Mr. Titmouse by going

out in procession to meet and welcome him were invited to spend a day at Yatton, and generally quitted it full of admiration of the dinner and wines they got, the unaffected good-nature and simplicity of their hospitable host, and the bland, composed, and intellectual deportment and conversation of Mr. Gammon.

On the first Sunday after the departure of Fitz-Snooks, Titmouse was prevailed upon to accompany the devout and exemplary Gammon to church; where, barring a good many ill-concealed yawns and constant fidgetiness, be conducted himself with tolerable decorum. Yet still the style of his dress, his air, and his countenance filled the little congregation with feelings of great astonishment, when they thought that *that* was the new Squire of Yatton, and for a melancholy moment contrasted him with his predecessor, Mr. Aubrey. As for the worthy vicar, Dr. Tatham, Gammon resolved to secure his good graces, and succeeded. He called upon him soon after having heard from Titmouse of his, Yahoo's, and Fitz-Snooks's encounter with Dr. Tatham, and expressed profound concern on hearing of the rude treatment he had encountered. He exhibited a gentleness and affability—tempering and enhancing his evident acuteness and knowledge of the world—which quite captivated the little Doctor. But, above all, the expressions of delicate sympathy and regret with which Gammon now and then alluded to the late occupants of Yatton, toward whom the stern requisitions of professional duty had caused him to play so odious a part, and his inquiries about them, drew out almost all that was in the little Doctor's heart concerning his departed friends.

While, however, under the pressure of Mr. Gammon's presence and authority, Titmouse was for a brief while leading this sober retired life at Yatton—why, he hardly knew, except that Gammon willed it—a circumstance occurred which suddenly placed him on the very highest pinnacle of popularity in metropolitan society, transforming him into a lion of the first magnitude. Be it known that there was a Mr. Bladdery Pip, a fashionable novelist, possessed of most extraordinary versatility and power, to whom it suddenly occurred, on glancing over the newspaper report of the famous trial, to make the interesting facts of the case the basis

of a new novel. To work went Mr. Pip, within a day or two after the trial was over, while his spirited publisher then quickly set about getting up the steam.

For some time there appeared in the daily papers numerous intimations that "the circles of *ton*" were "on the *qui vive*" with expectations of a certain, etc., etc., etc.—that "disclosures of a very extraordinary character" were being looked for—"attempts made to suppress," etc., etc.—"compromising certain distinguished," etc. and so forth (all these paragraphs being in the unquestionable *editorial* style)—as well as *genuine* indications of a mysterious under-current of curiosity and excitement existing in those circles which were watched with reverential awe and constancy by those in the lower regions.

There was no resisting this sort of thing. In that day a skilfully directed play of puffs laid prostrate the whole reading and fashionable world, producing the excitement of which they affected to chronicle the existence. The publisher had seven hundred copies printed of the story; and, allowing a hundred for a *first* edition, he varied the title-pages of the remainder by the words—"*Second* Edition"—"*Third* Edition"—"*Fourth* Edition"—"*Fifth* Edition"—"*Sixth* Edition"—and "*Seventh* Edition." By the time that the fourth edition had been announced, there existed a real rage for the book; the circulating libraries at the West End of the Town were besieged by applicants for a perusal of the work; and "notices," "reviews," and "extracts" began to make their appearance with increasing frequency in the newspapers. The idea of the work was admirable. The identity between Titmouse and *Tippetiwink*, Lord Dreddlington and *Lord Frizzleton*, Lady Cecilia and *Lady Sapphira*, and Mr. Aubrey and the "*the demon Mowbray*" was quickly established. The novel passed speedily into the tenth edition; an undoubted and a very great sensation was produced; extracts descriptive of the persons figuring in the story, particularly Titmouse and the Earl and Lady Cecilia, were given in the London papers, and thence transferred into those all over the country. The very author, Mr. Bladdery Pip, became a resuscitated lion, and, dressing himself in the most exquisite style, had his portrait, looking most intensely intellectual, prefixed to the tenth edition. Then came portraits of "Tittlebat Titmouse, Esq."

(for which he had never sat), giving him large melting eyes and a very pensive face and a most fashionable dress.

The Earl of Dreddlington and Lady Cecilia became also a lion and lioness. Hundreds of opera-glasses were directed at once to their box; innumerable were the anxious salutations they received as they drove round the Park—and they drove round it three or four times as often as they had ever done before. 'Twas whispered that the King had read the book, and drank the Earl's health, under the name of Lord Frizzleton—while the Queen did the same for Lady Cecilia as Lady Sapphira. Their appearance produced a manifest sensation at both the levee and drawing-room—Majesty looked blander than usual as they approached. Poor Lord Dreddlington and Lady Cecilia mounted in a trice into the seventh heaven of rapturous excitement. They were both unutterably happy, living in a gentle, delicious tumult of excited feelings. Irrepressible exultation glistened in the Earl's eyes; he threw an infinite deal of blandness and courtesy into his manners wherever he was and whomsoever he addressed, as if he could now easily afford it, confident in the inaccessible sublimity of his position. Innumerable were the inquiries after Titmouse—his person—his manners—his character—his dress, made of Lady Cecilia, by her friends. Young ladies tormented her for his autograph.

Presently the young men appeared everywhere in black satin stocks, embroidered, some with flowers, and others with gold, which went by the name of "*Titmouse Ties*"; and in hats with high crowns and rims a quarter of an inch in depth, called "*Tittlebats.*" All the young blades about town, especially in the City, dressed themselves in the most extravagant style; an amazing impetus was given to the cigar trade—whose shops were crowded, especially at nights—and every puppy that walked the streets puffed cigar-smoke in your eyes. In short, pert and lively *Titmice* might be seen hopping about the streets in all directions.

As for Tag-rag, wonders befell him. A paragraph in a paper pointed him out as the original of *Black-bag*, and his shop in Oxford Street as the scene of Titmouse's service. Thither quickly poured the tide of fashionable curiosity and custom. His business was soon trebled. He wore his best clothes every day, and smirked and smiled and bustled about

amidst the crowd in his shop in a fever of excitement. He began to think of buying the adjoining premises and adding them to his own, he set his name down as a subscriber of half-a-guinea-a-year to the "Decayed Drapers' Association." These were glorious times for Mr. Tag-rag. He had to engage a dozen extra hands; there were seldom less than fifty or a hundred persons in his shop at once; strings of carriages before his door, sometimes two deep, and strugglings between the coachmen for precedence.

The undulations of the popular excitement in town were not long in reaching the calm retreat of Titmouse in Yorkshire. Yatton was beginning to look duller daily, even before the arrival of this stimulating intelligence from town; Titmouse feeling quite out of his element. So—Gammon *non contradicente*—up came Titmouse to town. If he had not been naturally a fool the notice he attracted in London must soon have made him one. He had been for coming up in a post-chaise and four; but Gammon, in a letter, succeeded in dissuading him from incurring so useless an expense, assuring him that men of as high consideration as himself constantly availed themselves of the safe and rapid transit afforded by the royal mail. Giving strict and repeated orders to his valet to deposit him at once "in a first-rate West-End hotel," the haughty Lord of Yatton, plentifully provided with cigars, stepped into the mail, his valet perched upon the box seat. The mail passed the Peacock, at Islington, about half-past eight o'clock; and long before they had reached even that point, the eager and anxious eye of Titmouse had been on the lookout for indications of his celebrity. He was, however, compelled to own that both people and places seemed much as usual—wearing no particular air of excitement. When his hackney coach had rumbled slowly up to the lofty and gloomy door of the Harcourt Hotel, it seemed to excite no notice whatever. A tall waiter, in a plain suit of black evening dress, with his hands stuck behind his coat-tails, continued standing in the ample doorway, eying the plebeian vehicle which had drawn up with utter indifference—conjecturing, probably, that it had come to the wrong door. With the same air of provoking superciliousness he stood, till the valet, having jumped down from his seat beside the driver, ran up, and in a peremptory sort

of way exclaimed, "MR. TITMOUSE, of Yatton!" This stirred the waiter into something like energy.

"Here, sir!" called out Mr. Titmouse from within the coach; and on the waiter's slowly approaching, he inquired in a sufficiently swaggering manner, "Pray, has *the Earl of Dreddlington* been inquiring for me here to-day?" The words seemed to operate like magic, converting the person addressed, in a moment, into a slave—supple and obsequious.

"His lordship has not been here to-day, sir," he replied in a low tone, with a most courteous inclination, gently opening the door and noiselessly letting down the steps. "Do you alight, sir?"

"Why—a—have you room for me, and my *fellow* there?"

"Oh, yes, sir! certainly. Shall I show you into the coffee-room, sir?"

"The coffee-room? Curse the coffee-room, sir! Do you suppose I'm a commercial traveler? Show me into a private room, sir!" The waiter bowed low and in silent surprise led Mr. Titmouse to a very spacious and elegantly furnished apartment—where amidst the blaze of six wax candles, and attended by three waiters, he supped, an hour or two afterward, in great state—retiring about eleven o'clock to his apartment, overcome with fatigue—and brandy and water; having fortunately escaped the indignity of being forced to sit in the same room where an English nobleman, one or two members of Parliament, and a couple of foreign princes were sitting sipping their claret, some writing letters, and others conning over the evening papers.

About noon the next day he called upon the Earl of Dreddlington; and tho, under ordinary circumstances, his lordship would have considered the visit rather unseasonable, he nevertheless received his fortunate and now truly distinguished kinsman with the most urbane cordiality. At the Earl's suggestion, and with Mr. Gammon's concurrence, Titmouse, within about a week after his arrival in town, took chambers in the Albany, together with the elegant furniture which had belonged to their late tenant, a young officer of distinction, who had shortly before suddenly gone abroad upon a diplomatic mission. Mr. Titmouse soon began to feel, in various ways, the distinction which was attached to his name—commencing, as he did at once, the gay and bril-

liant life of a man of high fashion, and under the august auspices of the Earl of Dreddlington.

As a cat shod with walnut-shells by some merry scapegrace doubtless feels more and more astonished and excited at the clatter it makes in scampering up and down the bare echoing floors and staircases, so, in some sort, was it with Titmouse, and the sudden and amazing *éclat* with which all his appearances and movements were attended in the regions of fashion. It is a matter of indifference to a fool whether you laugh with him or at him, so that you do but laugh—an observation which will account for much of the conduct both of Lord Dreddlington and Titmouse. The Earl did not conceive it possible for any one to laugh at *him* or anything he might choose to do or any one he might think fit to associate with and introduce to the notice of society—which kind office he forthwith performed for Titmouse, with whose odd person and somewhat eccentric dress and demeanor his lordship was growing daily more familiar. Thus that which had at first so shocked him, he got at length thoroughly reconciled to, and began to suspect whether it was not assumed by Titmouse out of a daring scorn for the intrusive opinions of the world, which showed a loftiness of spirit akin to his own. Besides, in another point of view—suppose the manner and appearance of Titmouse were ever so absurd, so long as his lordship chose to tolerate them, who should venture to gainsay them? So the Earl asked him frequently to dinner, took him with them when his lordship and Lady Cecilia went out in the evenings; gave him a seat in his carriage in going down to the House; and invited him to accompany him and Lady Cecilia when they either drove or rode round the Park; for Titmouse's assiduous attention at the riding school had enabled him to appear on horseback without being *glaringly* unequal to the management of his horse, tho once or twice he contrived to give his mount an inclination toward backing upon those of Lady Cecilia and the Earl.

Titmouse happening to let fall, at the Earl's table, that he had that day ordered an elegant chariot to be built for him, his lordship intimated that a cab was the usual turnout of a bachelor man of fashion; whereupon Titmouse the next day countermanded his order, and was fortunate enough

to secure a cab which had just been completed for a young nobleman who was unable to pay for it, and whom, consequently, the builder did not mind disappointing. Titmouse soon provided himself with a great horse and a little tiger. What pen can do justice to the feelings with which he first sat down in that cab, yielding upon its well-balanced springs, took the reins from his little tiger, and then heard him jump up behind! As it was a trifle too early for the Park, he suddenly bethought himself of exhibiting his splendors before the establishment of Mr. Tag-rag.

Off he drove to the Oxford Street establishment, before the door of which five or six carriages were standing. I should say that, at the moment of Mr. Titmouse's strutting into that scene of his former miserable servitude, he experienced a gush of delight which was sufficient to efface all recollection of the misery, privation, and oppression endured in his early days. There was presently an evident flutter among the gentlemen engaged behind the counter—for, thought they, it must be "the great Mr. Titmouse!" Tag-rag, catching sight of him, bounced out of his little room, and bustled up to him through the crowd of customers, bowing, scraping, blushing, and rubbing his hands, full of pleasurable excitement, and exhibiting the most profound obsequiousness. "Hope you're well, sir," he commenced in a low tone, but instantly added, in a louder tone, observing that Titmouse chose to appear to have come upon business, "what can I have the honor to do for you, sir, this morning?" And handing him a stool, Tag-rag, with a respectful air, received a very liberal order from Mr. Titmouse, and minuted it down in his memorandum book.

"Dear me, sir, is that your cab?" said Tag-rag, as, having accompanied Titmouse, bowing every step, to the door, they both stood there for a moment, "I never saw such a beautiful turn-out in my life, sir——"

"Ya—a—s. Pretty well—pretty well; but that young rascal of mine's dirtied one of his boots a little—dem him!" and he looked terrors at the tiger.

"Oh, dear!—so he has; shall I wipe it off, sir? *Do* let me——"

"No, it don't signify much. By the way, Mr. Tag-rag," added Mr. Titmouse in a drawling way, "all well at—at—

demme if I've not at this moment forgot the name of your place in the country——"

"Satin Lodge, sir," said Tag-rag meekly, but with infinite inward uneasiness.

"Demme if I've not forgot the name of your place in the country"

"Oh—ay, to be sure. One sees, 'pon my soul, such a lot of places—but—all well?"

"All very well, indeed, sir; and constantly talking of you, sir."

"Ah—well! My compliments—" here he drew on his second glove, and moved toward his cab, Tag-rag accompanying him—"glad they're well. If ever I'm driving that way—good day!" In popped Titmouse—crack went his whip—away darted the horse—Tag-rag following it with an admiring and anxious eye.

As Mr. Titmouse sat in his new vehicle, on his way to the Park, dressed in the extreme of the mode, his glossy hat perched sideways on his bushy, well-oiled, but somewhat mottled hair; his surtout lined with velvet; his full satin stock, spangled with inwrought gold flowers, and with two splendid pins, connected together with delicate double gold chains; his shirt-collars turned down over his stock; his chased gold eyeglass stuck in his right eye; the stiff wrist-bands of his shirt turned back over his coat-cuffs; and his hands in snowy kid gloves, holding his whip and reins; and, as he considered the exquisite figure he must thus present to the eye of all beholders, giving them credit for gazing at him with the same sort of feelings which similar sights had, but a few months before, excited in *his* despairing breast, his little cup of happiness was full, and even brimming over.

The more that the Earl and Lady Cecilia perceived of Titmouse's popularity, the more eager they were in parading their connection with them, and openingly investing him with the character of a *protégé*. In addition to this, the Lady Cecilia had begun to have now and then a glimmering notion of the objects which her father was contemplating. If the Earl took Titmouse down to the House of Lords, and having secured him a place at the bar, would, immediately on entering, walk up to him, and be seen for some time condescendingly pointing out the different peers by name, as they entered, and explaining to his intelligent auditor the period and mode and cause of the creation and accession of many of them to their honors, and also the forms, ceremonies, and routine of business in the Houses; so Lady Cecilia was not remiss in availing herself, in her way, of the little opportunities which presented themselves. She invited Titmouse, for instance, one day early in the week to accompany them to church on the ensuing Sunday, and during the interval gave out amongst her intimate friends that they might expect to see Mr, Titmouse in her papa's pew. He accepted the

invitation, and, on the arrival of the appointed hour, might have been seen in the Earl's carriage, driving to afternoon service at the Reverend MORPHINE VELVET's chapel—Rosemary Chapel, near St. James's Square.

Four or five carriages had to set down before that containing the Earl of Dreddlington, Lady Cecilia, and Mr. Titmouse could draw up; by which time there had accumulated as many in its rear, so eager were the pious aristocrats to get into this holy retreat. As Titmouse, holding his hat and cane in one hand while with the other he arranged his hair, strutted up the center aisle, following the Earl and Lady Cecilia, he could hardly repress the exultation with which he thought of a former visit to that very chapel some two years before. *Then*, on attempting to enter the body of the chapel, the vergers had politely but firmly repulsed him; on which, swelling with vexation, he had ascended to the gallery, where, after being kept standing for ten minutes at least, he had been beckoned by the pew-opener toward the furthermost pew, close at the back of the organ, in which were four footmen, among whom he had been unceremoniously squeezed; and if he was disgusted with his mere contiguity, guess what must have been his feelings when the footman nearest to him good-naturedly forced upon him a part of his prayer-book, which Titmouse, ready to spit in his face, held with his finger and thumb, as tho it had been the tail of a snake. *Now*, how changed was all! He had become an aristocrat; in his veins ran some of the richest and oldest blood in the country; his brow might erelong be graced by the coronet which King Henry II. had placed upon the brow of the founder of his family, some seven hundred years before; and a tall footman, with powdered head, glistening silver shoulder-knot, and sky-blue livery, and carrying in a bag the gilded implements of devotion, was humbly following behind him!

What a remarkable and vivid contrast between his present and his former circumstances, was present at that moment to his reflecting mind! As he stood, his hat covering his face, in an attitude of devotion, "I wonder," thought he, "what all these nobs and swells would say if they knew how I had worshiped here on the last time?" and again, "'Pon my life, what would I give for—say Huckaback—to see me

just now!" What an elegant and fashionable air the congregation wore! Surely there must be something in religion when people such as were around him came so punctually to church, and behaved so seriously!

CHAPTER XX

HOW THE HERO IS PRESENTED AT COURT, AND MR. TAG-RAG IS MADE DRAPER AND HOSIER TO HIS MAJESTY, PAYING A LARGE PRICE FOR THE HONOR

THERE was one step in Mr. Titmouse's upward progress which he presently took, and which is worthy of special mention; I mean his presentation at court by the Earl of Dreddlington. This momentous affair was broached by the Earl one day after dinner, with an air of deep anxiety and interest. He commenced by giving Titmouse a long history of the origin and progress of such ceremonies, and a minute account of the practical manner of their observance, all of which, however, was to Titmouse only like breathing upon a mirror—passing as quickly out of one ear as it had entered into the other. When, however, the Earl came to the point of dress, Titmouse was indeed "a thing all ear, all eye," his faculties being stimulated to their utmost. The next morning he hurried off to his tailor to order a court dress. When it had been brought to his rooms and he had put it on, upon glancing at his figure in the glass, his face fell; he felt infinitely disappointed. After gazing at himself for a few moments in silence, he suddenly snapped his fingers, and exclaimed to the tailor, who, with the valet, was standing beside him: "Curse me if I like this thing at all! 'Pon my soul, I look the exact image of a footman; and a devilish vulgar one, too!"

"Oh, sir—I beg a thousand pardons!" exclaimed Mr. Clipclose, "what can I have been thinking about? There's the sword—we've quite forgot it!"

"Ah—'pon my life, I thought there was *something* wrong!" quoth Titmouse, as Mr. Clipclose buckled it on.

"I flatter myself that *now*, sir——" commenced he.

"Ya-as—quite the correct thing! 'Pon my soul, most uncommon striking!" exclaimed Titmouse, glancing at his

figure in the glass with a triumphant smile. "Isn't it odd, now, that this sword should make all the difference between me and a footman, by Jove?" Here his two companions were seized with a simultaneous fit of coughing.

"Certainly, sir; it undoubtedly gives—what shall I call it?—a grace—a finish—a sort of commanding—especially to a figure that becomes it," the tailor continued with cool assurance, observing that the valet understood him. "But—may I, sir, take so great a liberty? If you are not accustomed to wear a sword I beg to remind you that it will require particular care to manage it, and prevent it from getting between——"

"Demme, sir!" exclaimed Titmouse, starting aside with an offended air, "d'ye think I don't know how to manage a sword? By all that's tremendous"—and plucking the taper weapon out of its scabbard, he waved it over his head; then, throwing himself into the first position—he had latterly paid a good deal of attention to fencing—and with rather an excited air, he went through several of the preliminary movements.

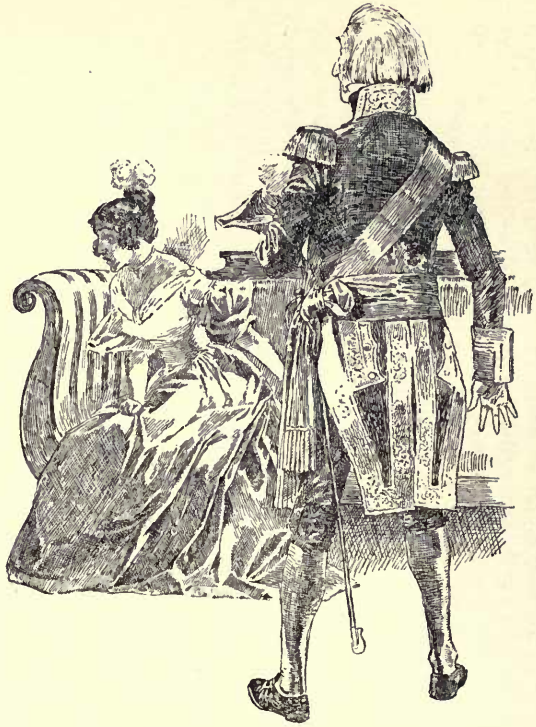
When the great day arrived he drove up, at the appointed hour, to the Earl of Dreddlington's, whose carriage, with an appearance of greater state than usual about it, was standing at the door. On alighting from his cab, he skipped so nimbly up-stairs that he could not have had time to observe the amusement which his figure occasioned even to the well-disciplined servants of the Earl of Dreddlington. Much allowance ought to have been made for them. Think of Mr. Titmouse's little knee-breeches, white silks, silver shoe-buckles, shirt ruffles and frills, coat, bag, and sword; and his hair plastered up with bear's grease, parted down the middle of his head, and curling out boldly over each temple; and his open countenance irradiated with a subdued smile of triumph and excitement!

On entering the drawing-room, he beheld a really striking object—the Earl in court costume, wearing his general's uniform, with all his glistening orders, and holding in his hand his hat, with its snowy plume, standing in readiness to set off for the levee. Lady Cecilia was sitting on the sofa, languidly talking to him; and from the start they both gave on Titmouse's entrance, it was plain that they could not have calculated upon the extraordinary transmogrification he must

have undergone in assuming court costume. For a moment or two each was as severely shocked as when his absurd figure had first presented itself in that drawing-room. "Oh, heavens!" murmured Lady Cecilia: while the Earl seemed struck dumb by the approaching figure of Titmouse. When Titmouse beheld the military air and superb equipments of the Earl—notwithstanding that Titmouse, too, wore a sword—he felt himself *done.* He advanced, however, pretty confidently—bobbing about, first to Lady Cecilia, and then to the Earl; and after a hasty salutation—"'Pon my life, my lord, I hope it's no offense, but your lordship *does* look most *particular* fine." The Earl made no reply, but inclined toward him magnificently—not seeing the meaning and intention of Titmouse, but affronted by his words.

"May I ask what your lordship thinks of *me?* First time I ever appeared in this kind of thing, my lord—ha! ha, your lordship sees!" As he spoke, his look and voice betrayed the overawing effects of the Earl's splendid appearance, which was rapidly freezing up the springs of familiarity, if not, indeed, of flippancy, that were bubbling up within the little bosom of Titmouse on his entering the room. His manner became involuntarily subdued and reverential. The Earl of Dreddington in plain clothes, and in full court costume, were two very different persons; tho his lordship would have been mortally affronted had he known that any one thought so. However he now regretted having offered to take Titmouse to the levee, there was no escape from the calamity; so, after a few minutes' pause, he rang the bell and announced his readiness to set off. Followed by Mr. Titmouse, his lordship slowly descended the stairs; and, when he was within two or three steps of the hall floor, it distresses me to relate that he fell nearly flat upon his face, and, but for his servants rushing up, would have been seriously hurt. Poor Titmouse had been the occasion of this disaster; for his sword getting between his legs, down he went against the Earl, who went naturally down upon the floor, as I have mentioned. Titmouse was not much hurt but terribly frightened, and went as pale as death when he looked at the Earl, who appeared a little agitated, but, not having been really injured, soon recovered his self-possession. Profuse were poor Titmouse's apologies, as may be supposed,

"May I ask what your lordship thinks of me?"



"Sir—enough has been said," quoth the Earl, rather coldly and haughtily, tired of the multiplied apologies and excuses of Titmouse. "I thank God, sir, that I am not hurt, tho, at my time of life, a fall is not a slight matter. Sir," continued the Earl bitterly, "*you* are not so much to blame as your tailor; he should have explained to you how to wear your sword!" With this, having cut Titmouse to the very quick, the Earl motioned him to the door; they soon entered the carriage; the door was closed; and, with a brace of footmen behind, away rolled these two truly distinguished subjects to pay their homage to majesty—which might be well proud of such homage.

"Sir, it is a very fine day," at last observed the Earl in a kind manner, after a stern silence of at least five minutes.

"Remarkable fine, my lord. I was just going to say so," replied Titmouse, greatly relieved; and presently they fell into their usual strain of conversation.

"We must learn to bear these little annoyances calmly," said the Earl graciously, on Titmouse's again alluding to his mishap; "as for me, sir, a person in the station to which it has pleased Heaven to call me, for purposes of its own, has peculiar and very grave anxieties." Soon they had entered the scene of splendid hubbub, which at once occupied and excited both their minds. Without was the eager crowd, gazing with admiration and awe at each equipage, with its brilliant occupants, that dashed past them; then the Life-Guardsmen, in glittering and formidable array, their long gleaming swords and polished helmets glancing and flashing in the sunlight. Within were the tall yeomen of the guard, in velvet caps and scarlet uniforms, and with ponderous partizans lining each side of the staircase. In short, there were all the grandeur, state, and ceremony that fence in the dread approaches to majesty. Fortunately, Titmouse was too much bewildered and flustered by the novel splendor around him to be aware of the ill-concealed laughter which his appearance excited on all hands.

In due course he was borne on, and issued in due form into the presence chamber—into the immediate presence of majesty. His heart palpitated; his dazzled eye caught a hasty glimpse of a tall magnificent figure standing before a throne. Advancing—scarce aware whether on his head or

his heels—he reverently paid his homage—then rising, was promptly ushered out through a different door; with no distinct impression of anything that he had witnessed!—'twas all a dazzling blaze of glory—a dim vision of awe! Little was he aware, poor soul, that the King had required him to be pointed out upon his approach, having heard of his celebrity in society; and that he had the distinguished honor of occasioning to majesty a very great effort to keep its countenance. It was not till after he had quitted the palace for some time that he breathed freely again.

While Titmouse was making this splendid figure in the upper regions of society, and forming there every hour new and brilliant connections and associations—in a perfect whirl of pleasure from morning to night—he did not ungratefully forget the amiable persons with whom he had been so familiar, and from whom he had received so many good offices in his earlier days and humbler circumstances. Had it not been for Gammon, I fear that, with Titmouse, it would have been: out of sight out of mind. But Gammon, ever watchful over the real interests of his charge, and also delighted to become the medium of conferring favors upon others without expense to himself, conveyed from time to time to the interesting family of the Tag-rags, special marks of Mr. Titmouse's courtesy and gratitude. At one time a haunch of venison would find its way to Mr. Tag-rag; at another, a fine work-box and a beautifully bound Bible came to good Mrs. Tag-rag; and lastly, a gay guitar to Miss Tag-rag.

It was on the occasion of a dinner at Satin Lodge that Mr. Titmouse and Mr. Gammon were favored by hearing Miss Tag-rag's voice accompanying her guitar; for when Mr. Tag-rag had sounded Mr. Gammon, and found that both he and Mr. Titmouse would be only too proud and happy to partake of his hospitality, they were invited. A very crack affair it was, given on a more splendid scale than Mr. Tag-rag had ever ventured upon before. He brought a bottle of champagne all the way from the Town with his own hands, and kept it nice and cool in the kitchen cistern for three days beforehand. It had not occurred to them to provide themselves with champagne glasses, so they managed as well as they could with the common ones—all but Titmouse, who with a

sort of fashionable recklessness to show how little he thought of it, poured out his champagne into his tumbler, which he two-thirds filled, and drank it off at a draft, Mr. Tag-rag trying to disguise the inward spasm it occasioned him, by a grievous smile.

"I always drink champagne out of a tumbler; I do—'pon my life," said Titmouse carelessly; "it's a devilish deal more pleasant."

"Ye-e-s—of course it is, sir," said Mr. Tag-rag rather faintly. Shortly afterward, Titmouse offered to take a glass of champagne with Miss Tag-rag. Her father's face flushed, and at length, with a bold effort, "Why, Mr. Titmouse," said he, trying desperately to look unconcerned, "the—fact is, I never keep more than a dozen or so in my cellar—and most unfortunately I found this afternoon that six bottles had—burst—I assure you."

"'Pon my soul, sorry to hear it," quoth Titmouse; "must send you a dozen of my own—I always keep about fifty or a hundred dozen. Oh, I'll send you half-a-dozen!"

Tag-rag scarcely knew, for a moment, whether he felt pleased or mortified at this stroke of delicate generosity. Thus it was that Titmouse evinced a disposition to shower marks of his favor and attachment upon the Tag-rags, in obedience to the injunctions of Gammon, who assured him that it was of very great importance for him to secure the good graces of Mr. Tag-rag. So Mr. Titmouse now drove up to Satin Lodge in his cab, and then rode thither, followed by his stylish groom; and on one occasion, artful little scamp! happening to find no one at home but Miss Tag-rag, he nevertheless alighted and stayed for nearly ten minutes, behaving precisely in the manner of an accepted suitor, aware that he might do so with impunity since there was no witness present; a little matter which had been suggested to him by Mr. Gammon. Poor Miss Tag-rag's cheek he kissed with every appearance of ardor, protesting that she was a monstrous lovely creature; and he left her in a state of delighted excitement, imagining herself the fated mistress of ten thousand a year and the blooming bride of the gay and fashionable Mr. Titmouse. When her excellent parents heard of what had that day occurred between Mr. Titmouse and their daughter, they also looked upon the thing as quite settled. In the

mean while the stream of prosperity flowed steadily in upon Mr. Tag-tag.

Determining to make hay while the sun shone, he resorted to several little devices for that purpose, such as a shirt front with frills in the shape of a capital "T," of which, under the name of "*Titties*," he sold immense numbers among the inferior swells of London. At length it occurred to Gammon to suggest to Titmouse a mode of conferring upon his old friend and master a mark of permanent, public, and substantial distinction; and this was the obtaining for him, through the Earl of Dreddlington, an appointment as one of the *royal tradesmen*—namely, draper and hosier to the King. When Mr. Tag-rag's disinterested and indefatigable benefactor, Gammon, called one day in Oxford Street, and mentioned the honor which Mr. Titmouse was bent upon doing his utmost, at Mr. Gammon's instance, to procure for Mr. Tag-rag, that respectable person was quite at a loss for terms in which adequately to express his gratitude. Titmouse readily consented to name the thing to the great man, and urge it in the best way he could.

The Earl listened to his application with an air of anxiety. "Sir," said he, "the world is acquainted with my reluctance to ask favors of those in office. When I was in office myself, I felt the inconvenience of such applications abundantly. Besides, the appointment you have named happens to be one of considerable importance, and requiring great influence to procure it. Consider, sir, the immense number of tradesmen there are of every description, of whom drapers and hosiers (according to the last returns laid before Parliament, at the instance of my friend Lord Goose) are by far the most numerous. All of them are naturally ambitious of so high a distinction; yet, sir, observe, that there is only one King and one royal family to serve. My Lord Chamberlain is, I have no doubt, harassed by applicants for such honors as you have mentioned."

Hereat Titmouse got startled at the unexpected magnitude of the favor he had applied for; and, declaring that he did not care a curse for Tag-rag, begged to withdraw his application. But the Earl, with a mighty fine air, interrupted him—"Sir, you are not in the least presuming upon your relationship with me, nor do I think you overrate the influence

I may happen—in short, sir, I will make it my business to see my LORD KO-TOO this very day, and sound him upon the subject."

That same day an interview took place between the two distinguished noblemen, Lord Dreddlington and Lord Ko-too. Each approached the other upon stilts. After a display of the most delicate tact on the part of Lord Dreddlington, Lord Ko-too, who made a mighty piece of work of it, promised to consider the application.

Within a day or two afterward, Mr. Tag-rag received a letter from the Lord Chamberlain's office, notifying that his Majesty had been graciously pleased to appoint him draper and hosier to his Majesty! It occasioned him feelings of tumultuous pride and pleasure, similar to those with which the Earl of Dreddlington would have received tidings of his long-coveted marquisate having been conferred upon him. He started off, within a quarter of an hour after the receipt of the letter, to a carver and gilder a few doors off, and gave orders for the immediate preparation of a first-rate cast, gilded, of the royal arms; which, in about a week's time, might be seen, a truly resplendent object, dazzling conspicuous over the central door of Mr. Tag-rag's establishment, inspiring awe in the minds of passers-by, and envy in the breasts of Mr. Tag-rag's neighbors and rivals.

Mr. Tag-rag's appointment did wonders with him in the estimation of the world. 'Twas evident that he was in a fair way of becoming the head house in the trade. His appointment caused no little ferment in that nook of the city with which he was connected. The worshipful Company of Squirt-makers elected him a member; and on a vacancy suddenly occurring in the ward to which he belonged, for he had a considerable shop in the City also, he was made a common Council-man. As for Satin Lodge, he stuck two little wings to it; and had one of the portraits of Tittlebat Titmouse (as Tippetiwink) hung over his drawing-room mantelpiece, splendidly framed and glazed.

Some little time after Tag-rag had obtained the royal appointment, Gammon, *happening* to be passing his shop, stepped in and, observing Mr. Tag-rag, very cordially greeted him; and then, as if it had been a thought of the moment only, without taking him from the shop, intimated that he

Inspiring awe in
the minds of the passers-by.

had been westward, engaged in completing the formal details of a rearrangement of the greater portion of Mr. Titmouse's estates, upon which that gentleman had recently determined; and the sight of Mr. Tag-rag's establishment had suggested to Mr. Gammon that possibly Mr. Tag-rag would feel gratified at being made a formal party to the transaction; as Mr. Gammon was sure that Mr. Titmouse would feel delighted at having associated with the Earl of Dreddlington, and one or two other persons of distinction, in the meditated arrangement, the name of so early and sincere a friend as Mr. Tag-rag; "one who, moreover"—here Gammon paused, and gave a smile of inexpressible significance—"but it was not for *him* to hint his suspicions——"

"Sir—I—I—*will* you come into my room?" interrupted Tag-rag, rather eagerly, anxious to have a more definite indication of Mr. Gammon's opinion; but that gentleman, looking at his watch, pleaded want of time, and suddenly shaking Mr. Tag-rag by the hand, moved toward the door.

"You were talking of signing, sir. Have you got with you what you want signed? I'll sign anything!—anything for Mr. Titmouse; only too proud—it's an honor to be any way connected with him." Gammon, on hearing this, felt in his pockets, as if he supposed that he should find there what he perfectly well knew had been lying ready, cut and dried, in his safe at Saffron Hill for months.

"I find I haven't got the little document with me," said he, carelessly; "I suppose it's lying about with other loose papers at the office, or may have been left at the Earl's."

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Gammon," said Tag-rag, considering. "Your office is at Saffron Hill? Well, I shall be passing your way about noon, to-morrow, on my way to my City establishment, and will look in and do all you wish."

"Could you arrange to meet the Earl there?—or, as his lordship's movements are—ah, ha!—not very——"

"Should be most proud to meet his lordship, sir, to express my personal gratitude——"

"Oh, the Earl never likes to be reminded, Mr. Tag-rag, of any little courtesy or kindness he may have conferred! But if you will be with us about twelve, we can wait a little while; and if his lordship should not be punctual, we must even let you sign first—ah, ha!—and explain it to his lord-

ship on his arrival, for I know your time's very precious, Mr. Tag-rag! Gracious! Mr. Tag-rag, what a constant stream of customers you have!—I heard it said, the other day, that you were rapidly absorbing all the leading business in your line in Oxford Street."

"You're very polite, Mr. Gammon! Certainly, I've no reason to complain. I always keep the best of everything, both here and in the City, and sell at the lowest prices, and spare no pains to please; and it's hard if——"

"Ah!—how do you do?" quoth Gammon, suddenly starting, and bowing to some one on the other side of the way, whom he did *not* see. "Well, good-day, Mr. Tag-rag—good-day! To-morrow at twelve, by the way!"

Just about twelve o'clock the next day, Tag-rag, in a great bustle, saying he had fifty places to call at in the City, made his appearance at Saffron Hill.

"His lordship a'n't here, I suppose?" quoth he, after shaking hands with Mr. Quirk and Mr. Gammon. The latter gentleman pulled out his watch, and shrugging his shoulders said with a smile, "No—we'll give him half an hour's grace."

"Half an hour, my dear sir," exclaimed Tag-rag; "I couldn't stay so long even for the high honor of meeting his lordship. I am a man of business, he isn't; first come, first served, you know, eh? All fair, that!" There were a good many recently engrossed parchments and writings scattered over the table, and from among them Gammon, after tossing them about for some time, at length drew out a sheet of foolscap. It was stamped, and there was writing upon the first and second pages.

"Now, gentlemen, quick's the word—time's precious!" said Tag-rag, taking up a pen and dipping it into the inkstand. Gammon, with an unconcerned air, placed before him the document he had been looking for. "Ah! how well I know the signature! That flourish of his—a sort of boldness about it, a'n't there?" said Tag-rag, observing the signature of Titmouse immediately above the spot on which he was going to place his own; there being written in pencil underneath, the word "Dreddlington," evidently for the intended signature of the Earl. "I'm between two good ones, at any rate, eh?" said Tag-rag. Gammon or Quirk said something about a "term to attend the inheritance"—"trus-

tee of an outstanding term"—"legal estate vested in the trustees"—"too great power to be put in the hands of any but those of the highest honor."

"Stay!" quoth Gammon, ringing his little hand-bell—"nothing like regularity, even in trifles." He was answered by one of the clerks—a very dashing person. "We only wish you to witness a signature," said Gammon. "Now, we shall release you, Mr. Tag-rag, in a moment. Say 'I deliver this as my act and deed'—putting your finger on the little wafer there."

So said and so did Mr. Tag-rag, as he had been directed; the clerk wrote his name under the witnessing clause, and from that moment Mr. Tag-rag had unconsciously acquired an interest in the future stability of Mr. Titmouse's fortunes, to the extent of some FORTY THOUSAND POUNDS!

"*Now*, gentlemen, you'll make my compliments to his lordship, and, if he asks how I came to sign before him, explain the hurry I was in. Time and tide wait for no man. Good-morning, gentlemen, good-morning; best regards to our friend, Mr. Titmouse." Gammon attended him to the door, cordially shaking him by the hand, and presently returned to the room he had just quitted, where he found Mr. Quirk holding in his hand the document just signed by Tag-rag; which was, in fact, a joint and several bond, conditioned in a penalty of forty thousand pounds, for the due payment by Titmouse of twenty thousand pounds and interest at five per cent, about to be advanced to him on mortgage of a portion of the Yatton property. Gammon, sitting down, gently took the instrument from Mr. Quirk, and with a bit of india-rubber calmly effaced the pencil signature of "*Dreddlington.*"

"You're a d——d clever fellow, Gammon!" exclaimed Mr. Quirk presently, with a sort of sigh, and after, as it were, holding his breath for some time. Gammon made no reply. His face was slightly pale and wore an anxious expression.

"It will do *now*," continued Mr. Quirk, rubbing his hands, and with a gleeful expression of countenance.

"That remains to be seen," replied Gammon in a low tone.

"Eh? What? Does anything occur—eh! By Jove, no screw loose, I hope?"

"No—but we're in *very deep water now*, Mr. Quirk——"

"Well—devil only cares, so long as *you* keep a sharp look-out, Gammon. I'll trust the helm to you."

As Gammon did not seem in a talkative mood, Quirk shortly afterward left him.

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH THE EARL AND LADY CECILIA VISIT YATTON, WHERE THE HERO PROPOSES MATRIMONY TO THE LATTER AND IS ACCEPTED

The London season was now advancing toward its close, and where the Earl of Dreddlington and Lady Cecilia were to pass their autumn was a question which they were beginning to discuss rather anxiously. Pensively ruminating on these matters one evening, they were interrupted by a servant bringing in a note which proved to be from Titmouse —inviting them, in terms of profound courtesy and great cordiality, to honor Yatton by making a stay there during as great a portion of the autumn as they could not better occupy. Mr. Titmouse frankly added that he could not avoid acknowledging some little degree of selfishness in giving the invitation—namely, in expressing a hope that the Earl's presence would afford him, if so disposed, an opportunity of introducing him—Titmouse—to any of the leading members of the county who might be honored by the Earl's acquaintance; that, situated as Titmouse was, he felt an increasing anxiety on that point. He added that he trusted the Earl and Lady Cecilia would consider Yatton, while they were there, as in all respects their own residence, and that he, Titmouse, would spare no exertion to render their stay as agreeable as possible.

The humble appeal of Titmouse prevailed with his great kinsman, who, on the next day, sent him a letter, saying that his lordship fully recognized the claims which Mr. Titmouse had upon him as the head of the family, and that his lordship should feel very glad in availing himself of the opportunity which offered itself, of placing Mr. Titmouse on a proper footing of intercourse with the people of the county. That, for this purpose, his lordship should decline any invitations they might receive to pass their autumn elsewhere, etc., etc., etc. In plain English they jumped at the invitation. It had

emanated originally from Gammon, who, from motives of his own, was bent upon becoming personally acquainted with the Earl, and fixing himself, if possible, thoroughly in his lordship's confidence. As soon, therefore, as the Earl's acceptance of the invitation had been communicated to Gammon, he resolved to be one of the guests at Yatton during the time of the Earl's stay—a step into the propriety of which he easily brought Mr. Quirk to enter, but which he did not, for the present, communicate to Titmouse, lest he should, by prematurely disclosing it to the Earl, raise any obstacle arising out of an objection on the part of his lordship, who, if he but found Gammon actually *there*, must submit to the infliction with what grace he might.

The Earl had chosen to extend the invitation to Miss Macspleuchan, and also to as many attendants as he thought fit to take with him, instead of letting them consume their board wages in entire idleness in town or at Poppleton. Heavens! what accommodation was required, for the Earl, the Lady Cecilia, each of their personal attendants, Miss Macspleuchan, and five servants! Then there were two other guests invited, in order to form company and amusement for the Earl—the Marquis Gants-Jaunes de Millefleurs, and a Mr. Tuft. Accommodations must be had for these; and, to secure it, Mr. Titmouse and Mr. Gammon were driven to almost the extremities of the house. Four servants, in a sort of baggage-wagon, preceded the arrival of the Earl and Lady Cecilia by a day or two, in order to "arrange everything"; and, somehow or another, one of the first things done with this view was to install his lordship's chief servants in the quarters of Mr. Titmouse's servants, who, it was suggested, should endeavor to make themselves as comfortable as they could in some little unfurnished rooms over the stables! And, in a word, before Mr. Titmouse's grand guests had been at the Hall four-and-twenty hours there was established there the same freezing state and solemn ceremony which prevailed in the Earl's own establishment.

Down came at length, thundering through the village, the Earl's dusty traveling-carriage and four; himself, Lady Cecilia, and Miss Macspleuchan within, his valet and Lady Cecilia's maid behind; presently it wound around the park road, crashing and flashing through the gravel, and rattling

under the old gateway, and at length stood before the Hall door—the reeking horses pulled up with a sudden jerk, which almost threw them all upon their haunches. Mr. Titmouse was in readiness to receive his distinguished visitors; the carriage-door was opened—down went the steps—and in a few moments' time the proud old Earl of Dreddlington and his proud daughter, having entered the Hall, had become the guests of its flustered and ambitious little proprietor.

When the party had collected in the drawing-room in readiness for dinner, you might have seen Mr. Tuft in earnestly respectful conversation with the Lady Cecilia; Mr. Gammon standing talking to Miss Macspleuchan with an air of courteous ease and frankness—having observed her sitting neglected by everybody; the Earl conversing now with the Marquis, then with Titmouse, and anon with Tuft, with whom he appeared to be particularly pleased. Happening at length to be standing near Gammon—a calm, gentlemanlike person, of whom he knew nothing, nor suspected that his keen eye had taken in his lordship's true character and capacity at a glance—the Earl fell into casual conversation with him for a moment or two. The air of deference with which Gammon received the slight advances of the great man was exquisite and indescribable. It gave him clearly to understand that his lofty pretensions were known to, and profoundly appreciated by, the individual he was addressing. Gammon said but little; that little, however, how significant and decisive! He knew that the Earl would presently inquire of Titmouse who the unknown visitor was; and that on being told in the conceited and probably disparaging manner which Gammon knew Titmouse would adopt, if he supposed it would please the Earl, that "it was only Mr. Gammon, one of his solicitors," he would sink at once and forever beneath the notice of the Earl. He resolved, therefore, to anticipate—to contrive that it should ooze out easily and advantageously from himself, so that he could see the effect it had upon the Earl, and to regulate his movements accordingly.

Watching his opportunity, he gently introduced the topic of the recent change of ownership which Yatton had undergone; and in speaking of the manner in which Mr. Titmouse had borne his sudden prosperity—"Yes, my lord," continued Gammon, with apparent carelessness, "I recollect making

some such observation to him, and he replied, 'Very true, *Mr. Gammon.*'" Gammon finished his sentence calmly; but he perceived that the Earl had withdrawn himself into his earldom. He had given a very slight start; a little color had mounted into his cheek; a sensible hauteur had been assumed, and by the time that Gammon had done speaking, the space between them had been—as Lord Dreddlington imagined, unobservedly—increased by two or three inches. Gammon was a *man*—an able and a proud man—and he felt galled; but, "Let it pass," he presently reflected, "let it pass, you pompous old idiot; I will one day repay it with interest."

During dinner the Earl's attention was engrossed by Mr. Tuft, who sat next to him, chattering in his ear like a little magpie perched upon his shoulder. The Marquis sat next to the Lady Cecilia; for whose amusement, as far as his cautious tact would allow him, he from time to time drew out their little host. At length, in answer to a question by the Marquis, the Earl let fall some pompous observation, which the Marquis, who was getting very tired of the vapid monotony which pervaded the table, ventured to differ from pretty decisively. Tuft instantly sided with the Earl, and spoke with infinite fluency for some minutes; Gammon saw in a moment that he was an absurd pretender, and, watching his opportunity, with one word exposed a palpable historical blunder of poor Tuft's, overthrowing him as completely as a bullet from a crossbow dislodges a tomtit from the wall on which he is hopping about, unconscious of his danger.

"That's a *settler*, Tuft," said the Marquis, after a pause. Tuft reddened violently and gulped down a glass of wine, and presently, with the slightly staggered Earl, became a silent listener to the discussion into which the Marquis and Gammon had entered. Obtuse as was the Earl, Gammon contrived to let him see how effectually he was supporting his lordship's opinion, which Mr. Tuft had so ridiculously failed to uphold. The Marquis got slightly the worst of the encounter with Gammon, whose object he saw and whose tact he admired, and with much judgment permitted Gammon to appear to the Earl as his successful defender, in order that he might himself make a friend of Gammon.

However it might possibly be that his grand guests enjoyed

themselves, it was far otherwise with Mr. Titmouse, who, being compelled to keep sober, was quite miserable. None of those around him were drinking men—and the consequence was that he would retire early to his bedroom, and regale himself with brandy and water and cigars, while his guests amused themselves with cards, billiards, or otherwise, as best they might. He did, indeed, "stand like a cipher in the great account"; instead of feeling himself the Earl of Dreddlington's host, he felt himself as one of his lordship's guests, struggling in vain against the freezing state and etiquette which the Earl carried with him wherever he went, like a sort of atmosphere. In this extremity he secretly clung to Gammon, and reposed upon his powerful support and sympathy more implicitly than ever he had done before.

As the shooting season had commenced, and game was plentiful at Yatton, the Marquis and Tuft found full occupation during the day, as occasionally did Mr. Gammon. Mr. Titmouse once accompanied them; but on his contriving once or twice very nearly to blow his own hand off, and also to blow out the eyes of the Marquis, they intimated that he had better go out alone for the future—as he did once or twice, but soon got tired of such solitary sport. Besides—hares, pheasants, partridges—old and young, cock or hen—'twas all one—none of them seemed to care one straw for him or his gun, let him pop and blaze away as loud and as long, as near or as far off, as he liked. The only thing he hit—and that plump—was one of his unfortunate dogs, which he killed on the spot; and then coming up with it, stamped upon the poor creature's bleeding carcass, saying, with a furious oath, "Why don't you keep out of the way, you brute?"

As Gammon, a little to the Earl's surprise, continued apparently a permanent guest at the Hall, where he seemed ever engaged in superintending and getting into order the important affairs of Mr. Titmouse, it could hardly be but that he and the Earl should be occasionally thrown together; for as the Earl did not shoot, and never read books, even had there been any to read, he had little to do, but saunter about the house and grounds, and enter into conversation with almost any one he met. The assistance which Gammon had rendered the Earl on the occasion of their first meeting

at dinner had not been forgotten by his lordship, but had served to take off the edge from his preconceived contemptuous dislike for him. Gammon steadily kept in the background, resolved that all advances should come from the

"Why don't you keep out of the way, you brute?"

Earl. When once or twice his lordship inquired, with what Gammon saw to be only an affected carelessness, into the state of Mr. Titmouse's affairs, Mr. Gammon evinced a courteous readiness to give him *general* information; but with an

evident caution and anxiety not unduly to expose, even to the Earl, Mr. Titmouse's distinguished kinsman, the state of his property. He would, however, disclose sufficient to satisfy the Earl of Mr. Gammon's zeal and ability on behalf of Mr. Titmouse's interests, his consummate qualifications as a man of business, and from time to time perceived that his display was not lost upon the Earl.

Mr. Gammon's anxiety, in particular, to prevent the borough of Yatton from being a second time wrested out of the hands of its proprietor, and returning, by a corrupt and profligate arrangement with Ministers, a Tory to Parliament, gave the Earl peculiar satisfaction. He was led into a long conversation with Mr. Gammon upon political matters, and, at its close, was greatly struck with the soundness of his views, the strength of his liberal principles, and the vigor and acuteness with which he had throughout agreed with everything the Earl had said and fortified every position he had taken; evincing, at the same time, a profound appreciation of his lordship's luminous exposition of political principles. The Earl was forced to own to himself that he had never before met with a man of Mr. Gammon's strength of intellect, whose views and opinions had so intimately and entirely coincided —were, indeed, identical—with his own.

The longer that the Earl continued at Yatton the more he was struck with its beauties; and the oftener they presented themselves to his mind's eye, the keener became his regrets at the splitting of the family interests which had so long existed, and his desire to take advantage of what seemed almost an opportunity specially afforded by Providence for reuniting them. As the Earl took his solitary walks he thought with a deep anxiety of his own advanced age and sensibly increasing feebleness. The position of his affairs was not satisfactory. To succeed him there was an only child—and that a daughter—on whom would devolve the splendid responsibility of sustaining, alone, the honors of her ancient family. On the other hand there was his newly discovered kinsman, Mr. Titmouse, sole and unembarrassed owner of this fine old family property; simple-minded and confiding, with a truly reverential feeling toward them, the heads of the family; also the undoubted, undisputed proprietor of the borough of Yatton; and who was, moreover, already next in

succession, after himself and the Lady Cecilia, to the ancient barony of Drelincourt and the estates annexed to it.

How little was there, in reality, to set against all this? An eccentricity of manner, for which nature only, if any one, was to blame; a tendency to extreme modishness in dress; a slight deficiency in the knowledge of the etiquette of society—but which daily experience and intercourse were rapidly supplying; and a slight disposition toward the pleasures of the table, which, no doubt, would disappear on the instant of his having an object of permanent and elevating attachment. Such was Titmouse. He had as yet, undoubtedly, made no advances to Lady Cecilia, nor evinced any disposition to do so, tho numerous and favorable had been, and continued to be, the opportunities for his doing so. Might not this, however, be set down entirely to the score of his excessive diffidence—distrust of his pretensions to aspire after so august an alliance as with the Lady Cecilia? Yet there certainly was another way of accounting for his conduct; had he got already entangled with an attachment elsewhere?—Run after in society, as he had been, in a manner totally unprecedented during his very first season—had his affections been inveigled?—When the Earl dwelt upon this dismal possibility, if it were when he was lying awake in bed, he would be seized with a fit of intolerable restlessness—and getting up, he would wrap himself in his dressing-gown and pace his chamber for an hour at a time, running over in his mind the names of all the women he knew who would be likely to lay snares for Titmouse in order to secure him for a daughter.

Then there was the Lady Cecilia—but she, he knew, would not run counter to his wishes, and he had, therefore, no difficulty to apprehend on *that* score. She had ever been calmly submissive to his will; had the same lofty sense of family dignity that he enjoyed; and had often concurred in his deep regrets on account of the separation of the family interests. She was still unmarried—and yet, on her father's decease, would be a peeress in her own right, and possessed of the family estates. That fastidiousness which alone, thought the Earl, had kept her hitherto single, would not, he felt persuaded, be allowed by her to prevent so excellent a family arrangement as would be effected by her union with

Titmouse. Once married—and he having secured for her suitable settlements from Titmouse, if there should prove to be any incompatibility of temper or discrepancy of disposition, come the worst to the worst, there was the shelter of a separation and separate maintenance to look at; a thing which was becoming of daily occurrence—which implied no reproach to either party—and left them always at liberty to return to each other's society when so disposed. And as for the dress and manners of Titmouse, granting them to be a little extravagant, would not, in all probability, a word from her suffice to *reduce* him, or *elevate* him into a gentleman?

The difficulty which at present harassed his lordship was how he could, without compromising his own dignity, or injuring his darling scheme by a premature development of his purpose, sound Titmouse upon the subject. How to break the ice—to broach the subject—was the great problem which the Earl turned over and over again in his mind. He had thought of half a dozen different ways of commencing with Titmouse, and decided upon adopting each; yet, when the anxiously looked for moment had arrived, he lost sight of them all, in his inward fluster and nervousness.

'Twas noon, and Titmouse, smoking a cigar, was walking slowly up and down, his hands stuck into his surtout pockets and resting on his hips, in the fir-tree walk at the end of the garden. When the Earl saw that Titmouse, aware that his lordship had observed him, had tossed aside his cigar, the Earl "begged" he would go on, and tried to calm and steady himself, by a moment's reflection upon his overwhelming superiority over Titmouse in every respect; but it was in vain.

Now, what anxiety and embarrassment would the Earl have been spared had he been aware of one little fact, that Mr. Gammon was unconsciously, secretly, and potently his lordship's friend in the great matter which lay so near to his heart? For so it was, in truth. He had used all the art he was master of, and availed himself of all his mysterious power over Titmouse, to get him at all events to make advances toward his distinguished kinswoman.

Gammon proceeded to excite the pride and ambition of Titmouse, by representations of the splendor of an alliance

with the last representative of so ancient and illustrious a house; in fact, when he came, said Gammon, to think of it, he found it was *too* grand a stroke, and that she would not entertain the notion for a moment; that she had refused crowds of young lords; that she would be a peeress of the realm in her own right, with an independent income of £5,000 a year, and mansions, seats, and castles in each of the four quarters of the kingdom. Topics such as these excited and inflated Titmouse to the full extent desired by Mr. Gammon, who, moreover, with great solemnity of manner, gave him distinctly to understand that on his being able to effect an alliance with the Lady Cecilia absolutely depended his continuance in or expulsion from the possession of the whole Yatton property. Thus it came to pass that Titmouse was penetrated by a far keener desire to ally himself to the Lady Cecilia than ever the Earl had experienced to bring about such an auspicious event.

"Well, Mr. Titmouse," commenced the Earl blandly, stepping at once with graceful boldness out of the mist, confusion, and perplexity which prevailed among his lordship's ideas, "*what are you thinking about?* For you *seem* to be thinking!" and a courteous little laugh accompanied the last words.

"'Pon—'pon my life—I—I—*beg* your lordship's pardon—but it's—monstrous odd your lordship should have known it," stammered Titmouse; and his face suddenly grew of a scarlet color.

"Sir," replied the Earl, with greater skill than he had ever evinced in his whole life before, "it is not at all odd, when it happens that—the probability is—that—we are, perhaps—mind, sir, I mean possibly—thinking about the same thing!" Titmouse grew more and more confused, gazing in silence, with a simpering stare, at his noble companion, who, with his hands joined behind him, was walking slowly along with Titmouse.

"Sir," continued the Earl in a low tone, breaking a very awkward pause, "it gives me sincere satisfaction to assure you that I can fully appreciate the delicate embarrassment which I perceive you are now——"

"My lord—your lordship's most *uncommon* polite," quoth Titmouse, suddenly taking off his hat and bowing very low.

The Earl moved his hat also, and slightly bowed, with a proudly gratified air; and again there occurred a little pause, which was broken by Titmouse.

"Then your lordship thinks it will do?" he inquired very sheepishly, but anxiously.

"Sir, I have the honor to assure you that as far as *I* am concerned I see no obst——"

"Yes—but excuse me, my lord—your lordship sees—I mean —my lord, your lordship sees——"

"Sir, I think, nay, I believe I *do*," interrupted the Earl, wishing to relieve the evident embarrassment of his companion, "but—I see nothing that should—alarm you."

"Doesn't your lordship, indeed?" inquired Titmouse rather briskly.

"Sir, it was a saying of one of the great—I mean, sir, it is —you must often have heard, sir—in short, *nothing venture, nothing have!*"

"I'd venture a precious deal, my lord, if I only thought I could get what *I'm* after!"

"Sir?" exclaimed the Earl condescendingly.

"If your lordship would only be so particular—so uncommon kind—as to name the thing to her ladyship—by way of —eh, my lord?—a sort of breaking the ice, and all that——"

"Sir, I feel and have a just pride in assuring you that the Lady Cecilia is a young lady of superior delicacy of——"

"*Does* your lordship really think I've a *ghost* of a chance?" interrupted Titmouse anxiously. "*She* must have named the thing to your lordship, no doubt—eh, my lord?"

This queer notion of the young lady's delicacy a little staggered her distinguished father for a moment or two. What was he to say? She and he had really often named the thing to each other; and here the question was put to him plumply. The Earl scorned a flat lie, and never condescended to equivocation except when it was absolutely necessary.

"Sir," he said hesitatingly, "undoubtedly—if I were to say—that now and then, when your attentions have been so pointed——"

"'Pon my life, my lord, I never meant it; if your lordship will only believe me," interrupted Titmouse earnestly; "I beg a thousand pardons—I mean no harm, my lord."

"Sir, there is no harm done," said the Earl kindly. "Sir, I know human nature too well, or I have lived thus long to little purpose, not to be aware that we are not always master of our own feelings."

"That's exactly it, my lord! Excuse me, but your lordship's hit the thing!"

"Do not imagine, Mr. Titmouse, that I think your attentions may have been *unpleasant* to the Lady Cecilia—by no means; I cannot, with truth, say any such thing!"

"Oh, my lord!" exclaimed Titmouse, taking off his hat, bowing, and placing his hand upon his breast, where his little heart was palpitating with unusual force and distinctness.

"*Faint heart*, says the proverb, Mr. Titmouse, ah, ah!" quoth the Earl with gentle gayety.

"Yes, my lord, it's enough to make one faint, indeed! Now, if your lordship (I'm not used to the sort of thing, my lord!) would just make a sort of beginning for me, my lord, with the Lady Cicely—to set us going, my lord—the least shove would do, my lord."

"Well, Mr. Titmouse," said the Earl with a gracious smile, "since your modesty is so overpowering—I'll try—to—become your ambassador to the Lady Cecilia. If, Mr. Titmouse," his lordship presently added, in a serious tone, "you are fortunate enough to succeed in engaging the affections of the Lady Cecilia, you will discover that you have secured indeed an invaluable prize."

"To be sure, my lord! And consider, too, her ladyship's uncommon high rank—it's so particular condescending. By the way, my lord, will she—if she and I can hit it off, so as to marry one another—be called *Mrs. Titmouse*, or shall I be called *Lord Titmouse!* I wonder how that will be, my lord? 'Tis only, your lordship understands, on Lady Cicely's account I ask, because it's, in course, all one to *me*, when once we're married."

The Earl was gazing at him as he went on, with an expression of mingled surprise and concern; presently, however, he added with calm seriousness: "Sir, it is not an unreasonable question, tho I should have imagined that you could hardly have been—but—in short, the Lady Cecilia will retain her rank and become the Lady Cecilia Titmouse—that is,

"Will she be called Mrs. Titmouse or will I be called Lord Titmouse?"

during my life; but, on my demise, she succeeds to the barony of Drelincourt, and then will be called, of course, Lady Drelincourt."

"And what shall I be then, my lord?" inquired Titmouse eagerly.

"Sir, you will of course continue Mr. Titmouse——"

"'Pon my life, my lord—shall I, indeed?" he interrupted, with a crestfallen air, "Mr. Titmouse and Lady Drelincourt? Excuse me, my lord, but it don't sound at all like man and wife——"

"Sir, so it always has been, and will be, and so it ever ought to be," replied the Earl gravely.

"Well, but, my lord—(excuse me, my lord)—but marriage is a very serious thing, my lord, your lordship knows——"

"It is, sir, indeed," replied the Earl, gloom visibly overspreading his features.

"Suppose," continued Titmouse, "Lady Cicely should die before me?"

The Earl, remaining silent, fixed on Titmouse the eye of a FATHER—a father, tho a very foolish one; and presently, with a sensible tremor in his voice, replied, "Sir, these are rather singular questions—but, in such a mournful contingency as the one you have hinted at——"

"Oh, my lord! I humbly beg pardon—of course, I should be, 'pon my soul, my lord, most uncommon sorry," interrupted Titmouse with a little alarm in his manner.

"I was saying, sir—that in such an event, if Lady Drelincourt left no issue, you would succeed to the barony; but should she leave issue, they will be called Honorable——"

"What!—'the Honorable Tittlebat Titmouse' if it's a boy, and the 'Honorable Cecilia Titmouse' if it's a girl?"

"Sir, it will be so—unless you should choose to take the name and arms of Dreddlington on marrying the sole heiress——"

"Oh! indeed, my lord? 'Pon my life, my lord, that's worth considering—because I a'n't over and above pleased with my own name. What will it cost to change it now, my lord?"

"Sir," said the Earl, struck with the idea, "that is really a matter worth considering. In a matter of that magnitude, sir, I presume that expense would not be a matter of serious consideration."

After some further conversation, the Earl came plump upon the great pivot upon which the whole arrangement was to turn—settlements and jointures—oh, as to *them*, Titmouse, who was recovering from the shock of the discovery that his marriage, however it might degrade the Lady Cecilia, would not ennoble him—promised everything—would leave everything in the hands of his lordship.

Soon afterward the Earl sought Lady Cecilia, and performed his promise, by preparing her to receive the proposals of TITTLEBAT TITMOUSE.

The desired opportunity occurred the next day. Titmouse had slept like a top all night, but Lady Cecilia had passed a sleepless night, and did not make her appearance at the breakfast table. Understanding, however, that her ladyship was in the drawing-room, Titmouse, who had bestowed during the interval more than usual pains upon his dress, gently opened the door, and observing that she was alone, reclining on the sofa, with a sudden beating of the heart closed the door and approached her, bowing profoundly. Poor Lady Cecilia immediately sat up, very pale and trembling.

"You aren't well this morning, are you, Lady Cicely?" said he, observing how pale she looked, and that she did not seem disposed to speak.

"I am quite well," she replied in a low tone.

"It's beginning to look like winter a little, eh, Lady Cicely?" said he, after an embarrassing pause, looking through the windows.

"Certainly it is getting rather cheerless," replied Lady Cecilia. Titmouse turned pale and, twirling his fingers in his hair, fixed upon her a stupid and most embarrassing look, under which her eyes fell toward the ground, and remained looking in that direction.

"I—I—hope his lordship's been saying a good word for me, Lady Cicely?"

"My father mentioned your name to me yesterday," she replied, trembling excessively.

"'Pon my soul, monstrous kind!" said Titmouse, trying desperately to look at his ease. "Said he'd break the ice for me." Here ensued another pause. "Everybody must have a beginning, you know. 'Pon my solemn honor, all he said about me is quite true." Profoundly as was Lady Cecilia

depressed, she looked up at Titmouse for a moment with evident surprise. "Now, Lady Cicely, just as between friends, didn't he tell you something *very* particular about me? Didn't he? Eh?" She made him no answer.

"I dare say, Lady Cicely, tho somehow you look sad enough, you a'n't vexed to see me here? Eh? There's many and many a woman in London that would—but it's no use now. 'Pon my soul I love you, I do, Lady Cicely." She trembled violently, for he was drawing his chair nearer to her. She felt sick—sick almost to death.

"I know it's—it's a monstrous unpleasant piece of—I mean, it's an awkward thing to do; but I hope you love *me*, Lady Cicely, eh? a little?" Her head hung down, and a very scalding tear oozed out and trickled down her cheek. "Hope you aren't sorry, dear Lady Cicely? *I'm* most uncommon proud and happy! Come, Lady Cicely." He took the thin white hand that was nearest him, and raised it to his lips; had his perception been only a trifle keener, he could not have failed to perceive a faint thrill pervade Lady Cecilia as he performed this act of gallantry, and an expression crossed her features which looked very much like disgust. He had seen love made on the stage frequently, and, as lovers did there, he now dropped down on one knee, still holding Lady Cecilia's hand in his, and pressing it a second time to his lips.

"If your ladyship will only make me—so—happy—as to be —my—wife—'pon my life, you're welcome to all I have; and you may consider this place entirely your own! Do you understand me, dearest Lady Cicely? Come! 'Pon my life—I'm quite distracted—do you love me, Lady Cicely? Only say the word."

A faint—a very faint sound issued from her lips—'twas "Yes." O poor Lady Cecilia! O fatal—fatal falsehood!

"Then as true as God's in heaven, dear gal, I love you," said he, with ardor and energy; and rising from his knee, he sat down beside her upon the sofa—placed an arm around her waist, and with his other hand grasped hers—and—imprinted a kiss upon her pale cheek.

"'Pon my life, Lady Cicely, you *are* a most lovely gal," quoth Titmouse with increasing energy—"and now you're all my own! Tho I *am* only plain Mr. Titmouse, and

'Twas "yes"—Oh, poor Lady Cecelia! Oh fatal fatal falsehood!

you'll be Lady Cicely still, I'll make you a good husband!" and again he pressed her hand and kissed her cold cheek. But slow and dull as were the Lady Cecilia's feelings, they were becoming too much excited to admit of her continuing much longer in the room.

"I'm sure you'll excuse me, Mr. Titmouse," said she, rising, and speaking quickly and faintly. When she had regained her room, she wept bitterly for upward of an hour; and Miss Macspleuchan, well aware of the cause of it, knew not how to console one who had so deliberately immolated herself before the hideous little image of Mammon; who, in degrading herself, had also degraded her whole sex. In due time, however, the *Aurora*, a morning fashionable London newspaper, announced to the public the auspicious event:

"It is rumored that Mr. Titmouse, who so lately recovered the very large estates at Yatton, in Yorkshire, and whose appearance in the fashionable world has created so great a sensation, and who is already connected by consanguinity with the ancient and noble family of Dreddlington, is about to form a closer alliance with it, and is now the accepted suitor of the lovely and accomplished Lady Cecilia Philippa Leopoldina Plantagenet, sole daughter and heiress of the Right Hon. the Earl of Dreddlington, and next in succession to the barony of Drelincourt, the most ancient, we believe, in the kingdom."

CHAPTER XXII

WHEREIN MR. GAMMON, PASSIONATELY ENAMOURED OF MISS AUBREY, CUNNINGLY CONTRIVES SEVERAL INTERVIEWS WHICH PRODUCE NOTHING BUT DISAPPOINTMENT

BEHOLD now, patient and reflecting reader, the situation of the Aubreys.

Bound hand and foot—so to speak—as Mr. Aubrey felt himself, and entirely at the mercy of Mr. Titmouse and his solicitors, what could he do but submit to almost any terms on which they chose to insist? Mr. Gammon's proposal was that Mr. Aubrey should forthwith discharge, without scrutiny, their bill of £3,946 14s. 6d.; give sufficient security for the payment of the sum of £10,000 to Mr. Titmouse within twelve or eighteen months' time, and two promissory notes for the sum of £5,000 each, payable at some future period. As to which he had to rely solely on the sincerity and forbearance of Mr. Gammon, and the ratification of his acts by Mr. Titmouse. This proposal was duly communicated by the unfortunate Aubrey to Messrs. Runnington, who advised him to accept the proposed terms as unquestionably fair, and, under circumstances, much more lenient than could have been expected. This might be so; but yet, how hopeless to *him* the idea of carrying it into effect! First of all, how were Messrs. Runnington's and Mr. Parkinson's bills to be got rid of—the former amounting to £1,670 12s., the latter to £756? And how were Mr. Aubrey and his family to *live* in the mean while, and how, moreover, were to be met the expenses of his legal education? All that Mr. Aubrey had, £3,000 stock (equal to £2,640 of money), and £423 in his banker's hands—his cash in hand, was £3,063. If he were to devote the whole of it to the discharge of the three attorneys' bills which he owed, he would still leave a gross balance unpaid of £3,310 12s. 6d.! And yet for *him* to talk of *giving security* for the payment of

£10,000 within eighteen months, and his own notes of hand for £10,000 more! It was really almost maddening to sit down and contemplate all this.

He resolved to devote every farthing he had, except £200, to the liquidation of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's account, and (in smaller proportion) of those also of Messrs. Runnington and Mr. Parkinson; if necessary, he resolved to sell his books and the remnant of old family plate that he had preserved. Then he would strain every nerve to contribute toward the support of himself and of his family—by his literary exertions, in every other moment that he could spare from his legal studies. He resolved also, tho with a shudder, to commit himself to Gammon and Titmouse's mercy by handing to them his two notes of hand for £10,000—*payable on demand*—for such Gammon intimated was usual in such a case, and would be required in the present one. But whither was he to look for security for the payment of £10,000 within eighteen months' time? While revolving these distracting and harassing topics in his mind, the name of Lord De la Zouch, his most intimate friend, always presented itself to him.

His lordship's income was at least eighty or a hundred thousand pounds a year; his habits were simple and unostentatious, tho he was of a truly munificent disposition; and he had not a large and expensive family—his only child being Mr. Delamere. He had ever professed to be a devoted friend to Mr. Aubrey—did not Providence, then, seem to point him out as one who should be applied to, to rescue from destruction a fallen friend? But, alas! the thought of sweet Kate suggested another source of embarrassment to Aubrey, who well knew the ardent and inextinguishable passion for her entertained by Geoffrey Delamere. So, indeed, it was; and, torn with conflicting emotions and considerations of this kind, nearly the whole of the fortnight granted to him for deliberation had elapsed, before he could make up his mind to apply to Lord De la Zouch. At length, however, with a sort of calm desperation, he determined to do so. He had requested Lord De la Zouch to address his answer to him at the Temple! and sure enough, by return of post, Mr. Aubrey found lying on his desk, on reaching the Temple three or four mornings afterward, the following letter:

"My very dear Aubrey:

"If you really value my friendship, never pain my feelings again by expressions of distrust as to the issue of *any* application of yours to me, such as are contained in your letter now lying before me. Has anything that has ever hitherto passed between us justified them? For Heaven's sake, tell your attorneys not to lose a moment in procuring the necessary instruments and forwarding them to me. I will then execute them immediately and return them to you by the next post or mail. If you will but at once set about this in a business-like way, I will forgive and forget all the absurd and *unkind* scruples with which your letter abounds. I insist on being your *sole surety*.

"And now, dear Aubrey, how get you on with Law? Does she smile, or scowl, upon you?

"How are dear Mrs. Aubrey and Miss Aubrey, and your little ones? Would that we could insist on all of you taking up your abode with us! Have you seen Geoffrey lately? He tells me that he is working very hard indeed at Oxford; and so says his tutor. It is more than ever I did. Pray write me by return. I am ever, my dear Aubrey, yours, faithfully and affectionately, De la Zouch."

No language can do justice to the feelings with which Mr. Aubrey perused the foregoing letter. Its generosity was infinitely enhanced by its delicacy; and both were most exquisitely appreciated by a man of his susceptibility and in his circumstances. He resolved to go to Messrs. Runnington, and set them into instant communication with Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap; and matters having been set in train for the speediest possible settlement, Mr. Aubrey returned to chambers, but quitted them an hour earlier than usual, to brighten the countenances of those he loved by the joyous intelligence he bore. But he found that they also had cheering news to communicate; so that this was, indeed, a memorable day to them.

Old Lady Stratton, an early and bosom friend of Aubrey's deceased mother, had, it may easily be believed, never ceased to take a lively interest in the fortunes of the unhappy Aubreys. She was now far advanced in years, and, tho she enjoyed an ample income, bestowed annually all her surplus

income in charity. Many years before, however, she had resolved upon making a provision for Miss Aubrey, whom she loved as if she had been her mother; and the expedient she had resorted to (quite unknown to the Aubreys) was to insure her life for the sum of £15,000, the whole of which sum she had intended to bequeath to Miss Aubrey. By effecting a loan from the insurance company upon her policy she had contrived to raise a sum of £2,000; and Miss Aubrey had that morning received a letter from her, begging her to present the sum in question (for which Lady Stratton had lodged a credit with her bankers in London) to her brother Mr. Aubrey, to dispose of as he pleased.

This seasonable assistance enabled him to make the following arrangement for liquidating the sums due on account of the tremendous attorneys' bills:

To Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, . . .	£2,500
Messrs. Runnington, ...	1,000
Mr. Parkinson, ...	500
	£4,000

If this arrangement could be effected, then he would be able to reserve in his own hands £1,063, and retain liabilities as under:

		s	d
Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap (balance),	£1,446	14	6
Messrs. Runnington (ditto), ...	670	12	0
Mr. Parkinson (ditto), ...	256	0	0
	£2,373	6	6

Heavy was his heart at beholding this result of even the most favorable mode of putting his case. Within a week's time Messrs. Runnington received the necessary security from Lord De la Zouch, who had thereby bound himself in the penal sum of £20,000 that Mr. Aubrey should, in eighteen months' time from the date of the bond, pay the principal sum of £10,000, with interest at five per cent.; and this instrument, together with Mr. Aubrey's two promissory notes for £5,000 each, and also cash to the amount of

£2,500 in part payment of their bill, having been delivered to Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap—who, after a great deal of reluctance on the part of Mr. Quirk, finally consented to allow the balance of £1,446 14s. 6d. to stand over—they delivered to him, first a receipt for so much on account of their own bill; and secondly, an instrument by which Tittlebat Titmouse, for the considerations therein expressed, did remise, release, and forever quitclaim, unto Charles Aubrey, his heirs, executors, and administrators, all other demands whatsoever. By this arrangement Mr. Aubrey was absolutely exonerated from the sum of £40,000, in which he stood indebted to Mr. Titmouse, and so far he had just cause for congratulation.

But was not his situation still one calculated to depress and alarm him more and more every time that he contemplated it? Where was he to find the sum requisite to release Lord De la Zouch from any part of his dreadful liability? For with such a surety in their power as that great and opulent peer, was it likely that Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap would be otherwise than peremptory and inflexible when the day of payment arrived? And if so, with what feelings must Mr. Aubrey see his noble and generous friend called upon to pay down nearly £11,000 for him? And was he not liable at any moment upon his own two notes for £5,000 each? And were they not likely to insist speedily on the discharge of their own serious balance of £1,446 odds?

Still pressed, as indeed he was, his spirit had by no means lost its elasticity, supported as he was by a powerful and unconquerable WILL—and also by a devout reliance upon the protection of Providence. Tho law is indeed an exhausting and absorbing study, and it was pursued by Mr. Aubrey with unflagging energy, yet he found time enough to contribute sensibly to the support of himself and his family by literary labors, expended principally upon compositions of a historical and political character. Theirs was, after all, with all that I have said, a happy little home. Sometimes Miss Aubrey would sit down to her piano, and accompany herself in some song or air, which equally, whether merry or mournful, revived innumerable touching and tender recollections of former days, and she often ceased, tremulously and in tears,

in which she was not unfrequently joined by both of those who had been listening to her. Then he would betake himself to his labors for the rest of the evening (not quitting the room), they either assisting him—fair and eager amanuenses!—or themselves reading, or engaged at needlework.

They kept up—especially Kate—a constant correspondence with good old Dr. Tatham, through whom they were thus apprised of everything of moment that transpired at Yatton, to which place their feelings clung with unalienable affection. Dr. Tatham's letters had indeed almost always a painful degree of interest attached to them. From his frequent mention of Mr. Gammon's name—and almost equally *favorable* as frequent—it appeared that he possessed a vast ascendency over Mr. Titmouse, and was, whenever he was at Yatton, in a manner its moving spirit. The Doctor represented Titmouse as a truly wretched creature, with no more sense of religion than a monkey; equally silly, selfish, and vulgar—unfeeling and tyrannical whenever he had an opportunity of exhibiting his real character.

One evening the servant brought up-stairs a letter addressed to Mr. Aubrey. The very first glance at its contents expelled the color from his cheek; he turned, in fact, so pale that Mrs. Aubrey and Kate also changed color and came and stood with beating hearts and suddenly suspended breath, one on each side of him, looking over the letter while he was reading it. As I intend presently to lay a copy of it before the reader, I shall first state a few circumstances which will make it appear that this letter may be compared to a shell thrown into a peaceful little citadel by a skilful, tho distant and unseen engineer—in short, I mean Mr. Gammon.

This astute and determined person had long been bent upon securing access to Mr. Aubrey's family circle for powerful reasons of his own. That Mr. Aubrey was by no means *anxious* for such a favor had been long before abundantly manifest to Gammon, and yet not in a way to give him any legitimate or reasonable grounds of offense. Nothing, he felt, could be more unexceptionably courteous than Mr. Aubrey's demeanor; yet it had been such as to satisfy him that, unless he resorted to some means of unusual efficacy, he never could get upon visiting terms with the Aubreys. The impression which Miss Aubrey had produced in Gammon's mind when

he had first seen her remained. Her beauty, her grace, her elevated character, her accomplishments, her high birth—all were exquisitely appreciated by him, and conspired to constitute a prize for the gaining of which he deemed no exertion too great, no enterprise too hazardous. She was, again, the only person the sight of whom had in any measure given vitality to his marble heart, exciting totally new thoughts and desires, such as stimulated him to a fierce and inflexible determination to succeed in his purposes. He was, in short, prepared to make almost any sacrifice, to wait any length of time, to do or suffer anything that man could do or suffer, whether derogatory to his personal honor or not, in order to secure either the affections of Miss Aubrey, or, at all events, her consent to a union with him.

Having early discovered the spot where Mr. Aubrey had fixed his residence, Mr. Gammon had made a point of lying in wait on a Sunday morning for the purpose of discovering the church to which they went; and having succeeded, he became a constant, an impassioned, tho an unseen observer of Miss Aubrey, from whom he seldom removed his eyes during the service. But this was to him a highly unsatisfactory state of things; he seemed, in fact, not to have made, nor to be likely to make, the least progress toward the accomplishment of his wishes, tho much time had already passed away. He was so deeply engrossed with the affairs of Titmouse—which required his presence very frequently at Yatton, and a great deal of his attention in town—as to prevent his taking any decisive steps for some time in the matter nearest his heart. At length, not having seen or heard anything of Mr. Aubrey for some weeks, during which he—Gammon—had been in town, he resolved on a new stroke of policy. Therefore he easily induced Mr. Quirk to despatch the following letter to Mr. Aubrey, the arrival of which had produced the sensation I have already intimated:

"Sir: We trust you will excuse our reminding you of the very large balance, £1,446 14s. 6d., still remaining due upon our account—and which we understood, at the time when the very favorable arrangement to you, with respect to Mr. Titmouse, was made, was to have been long before this liquidated. Whatever allowances we might have felt disposed, on

account of your peculiar situation, to have made, we cannot but feel a little surprised at your having allowed several months to elapse without making any allusion thereto. We are sorry to have to press you; but being much pressed ourselves with serious outlays, we are obliged to throw ourselves upon our resources; and it gives us pleasure to anticipate that you must by this time have made those arrangements that will admit of your immediate attention to our overdue account, and that will render unnecessary our resorting to hostile and compulsory proceedings. We trust that in a week's time we shall hear from you to that effect, that will render unnecessary our proceeding to extremities against you, which would be extremely painful to us.—We remain, sir, yours most obediently,

"QUIRK, GAMMON & SNAP.

"P. S.—We should have no objection, if it would materially relieve you, to take your note of hand for the aforesaid balance (£1,446 14s. 6d.) at two months, with interest and good security. Or say £800 down in two months, and a *warrant of attorney* for the remainder, at two months more."

As soon as all three of them had finished reading the above letter in the way I have described, Mrs. Aubrey threw her arms round her silent and oppressed husband's neck, and Kate, her bosom heaving with agitation, returned to her seat without uttering a word.

"My darling Charles!" faltered Mrs. Aubrey.

"Don't distress yourself, my Agnes," said he tenderly, "it is only reasonable that these people should ask for what is their own."

"They are wretches!—cruel harpies!" quoth Kate passionately, wiping her eyes; "they know that you have almost beggared yourself to pay off by far the greater part of their abominable bill, and that you are slaving day and night to enable you to——" Here her agitation was so excessive as to prevent her uttering another word.

"I must write and tell them," said Aubrey calmly, but with a countenance laden with gloom, "it is all I can do—but if they will *have patience with me, I will pay them all.*"

"Pray, what do you think, Charles, of your friend *Mr.*

Gammon now?" inquired Kate, suddenly and scornfully. "Oh, the smooth-tongued villain! I've always hated him!" Whilst she thus spoke, and whilst Mrs. Aubrey was, with a trembling hand, preparing tea, a double knock was heard at the street door.

"Pray what do you think, Charles, of your friend Mr Gammon now?"

"Gracious, Charles! who can that possibly be, and at this time of night?" exclaimed Kate with alarmed energy.

"I really cannot conjecture," replied Mr. Aubrey. The

servant in a few minutes terminated their suspense, by laying down on the table a card bearing the name of MR. GAMMON.

"Mr. Gammon!" exclaimed all three in a breath, looking apprehensively at each other. "Is he *alone*?" inquired Mr. Aubrey with forced calmness.

"Yes, sir."

"I shall see him at once," replied Mr. Aubrey. Taking one of the candles, and descending the stairs, he entered the study. In a chair near the little book-strewn table sat his dreaded visitor.

"O Mr. Aubrey!" commenced Mr. Gammon, "I perceive, from your manner, that my fears are justified and that I am an intruder. This visit appears indeed unseasonable; but, late this afternoon, I made a discovery which has shocked me beyond expression. Am I right, Mr. Aubrey, in supposing that this evening you have received a letter from Mr. Quirk, and about the balance due on our account?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Aubrey coldly.

"I thought as much," muttered Gammon with suppressed vehemence. "And he *knew* that my word was pledged to you that it should be long before you were troubled about the business."

"I have nothing to complain of, sir," said Mr. Aubrey, eying his agitated companion searchingly.

"But I have, Mr. Aubrey," said Gammon haughtily. "My senior partner has broken faith with me. Sir, you have already paid more than will cover what is justly due to us; and I recommend you, after this, to *have the bill taxed.* I do, sir, and thereby you will get rid of every farthing of the balance now demanded."

"And what you intend to do, for Heaven's sake, sir, do quickly, and do not keep me in suspense," said Aubrey, disregarding this last remark.

"Mr. Aubrey, I tell you, upon my sacred word of honor as a gentleman, that I entirely disown and scout this whole procedure; that I never knew anything about it till, accidentally, I discovered lying on Mr. Quirk's desk, after his departure this evening from the office, a rough draft of a letter which I presumed you had received, especially as, on a strict inquiry of the clerks, I found that a letter had been put

into the post addressed to you. Only a fortnight ago Mr. Quirk solemnly pledged himself never to mention the matter either to me or you again for at least a couple of years, unless something extraordinary should intervene. I am half disposed, on account of this and one or two other things which have happened, to close my connection with Mr. Quirk from this day—forever. He and I have nothing in common; and the kind of business which he prefers is perfectly odious to me. But if I should continue in the firm, I will undertake to supply you with one pretty conclusive evidence of my sincerity and truth in what I have been saying to you—namely, that, on the faith and honor of a gentleman, you may depend upon hearing no more on this matter from any member of our firm."

"Certainly, Mr. Gammon," said Mr. Aubrey, "the letter you have mentioned has occasioned me great distress; for it is utterly out of my power to comply with its requisitions; and if it be intended to be really acted on, all my little plans are forever frustrated—and I am at your mercy—to go to prison if you choose, and there end my days. But, after the explicit and voluntary assurance which you have given me, I feel it impossible not to believe you entirely. I can imagine no motive for what would be otherwise such elaborate deception."

"*Motive*, Mr. Aubrey! The only motive I am conscious of is one resting on profound sympathy for your misfortunes—admiration of your character—and aiming at your speedy extrication from your very serious embarrassments. Mr. Aubrey, it pains me inexpressibly to observe that your anxieties—your severe exertions—I trust in God I may not rightly add, your privations—are telling on your appearance. You are certainly much thinner."

It was impossible any longer to distrust the sincerity of Mr. Gammon—to withstand the arts of this consummate actor. Mr. Aubrey held out long, but at length surrendered entirely, and yielded implicit credence to all that Gammon had said. He looked fatigued and harassed; it was growing late; he had come on his errand of courtesy and kindness, a great distance; why should not Mr. Aubrey ask him up-stairs, to join them at tea? Why should he not have the inexpres-

sible gratification of letting Mr. Gammon himself, in his own pointed and impressive manner, dispel all their fears? He would, probably, not stay long.

"Mr. Gammon," said he, "there are only Mrs. Aubrey and my sister up-stairs. I am sure they will be happy to see me return to them in time for tea, accompanied by the bearer of such agreeable tidings as yours. For Mr. Quirk's letter, to be frank, reached me when in their presence and we all read it together, and were dreadfully disturbed at its contents." After a faint show of reluctance to trespass on the ladies so suddenly, and at so late an hour, Mr. Gammon slipped off his great-coat, and, with intense but suppressed feelings of exultation at the success of his scheme, followed Mr. Aubrey up-stairs. He felt not a little fluttered on entering the room and catching a first glimpse of the two lovely women—and one of them *Miss Aubrey*—sitting in it, their faces turned with eager interest and anxiety toward the door as he made his appearance.

"Let me introduce to you," said Mr. Aubrey quickly, and with a bright assuring smile, "a gentleman who has kindly called to relieve us all from great anxiety—Mr. Gammon; Mr. Gammon, Mrs. Aubrey—Miss Aubrey." Gammon bowed with deep deference, but easy self-possession; his soul thrilling within him at the sight of her whose image had never been from before his eyes since they had first seen her.

"I shall trespass on you for only a few minutes, ladies," said he, approaching the chair toward which he was motioned. "I could not resist the opportunity so politely afforded me by Mr. Aubrey of paying my compliments here, and personally assuring you of my utter abhorrence of the mercenary and oppressive conduct of a gentleman with whom, alas! I am closely connected in business, and whose letter to you of this evening I only casually became acquainted with a few moments before starting off hither. Forget it, ladies; I pledge my honor that it shall *never be acted on!*"

"I'm sure we're happy to see you, Mr. Gammon, and very much obliged to you, indeed," said Mrs. Aubrey, with a sweet smile, and a face from which alarm was vanishing fast. Miss Aubrey said nothing; her brilliant eye glanced with piercing anxiety, now at her brother, then at his companion. Gammon felt that he was distrusted. Nothing could be more

prepossessing—more bland and insinuating, without a trace of fulsomeness than his manner and address, as he took his seat between Mrs. Aubrey and Miss Aubrey, whose paleness rather suddenly gave way to a vivid and beautiful flush; and her eyes presently sparkled with delighted surprise on perceiving the relieved air of her brother and the apparent cordiality and sincerity of Mr. Gammon. Whenever she reflected, moreover, on her expressions of harshness and severity concerning him that very evening, and of which he now appeared so undeserving, it threw into her manner toward him a sort of delicate and charming embarrassment. What would he not have given to kiss the fair and delicate white hand that passed to him his tea-cup! Then Gammon's thoughts turned for a moment inward—*why, what a scoundrel was he!* At that instant he was, as it were, reeking with his recent lie. He was there on cruel, false pretenses, which alone had secured him access into that little drawing-room, and brought him into contiguity with the dazzling beauty beside him—pure, and innocent as beautiful;—he was a fiend beside an angel. What an execrable hypocrite was he!

At length they all got into animated conversation. He was infinitely struck and charmed by the unaffected simplicity and frankness of their manners, yet he felt a sad and painful consciousness of not having made the least way with them; tho physically near to them, he seemed really at an unapproachable distance from them, and particularly from Miss Aubrey. He felt that the courtesy bestowed upon him was accidental, the result merely of his present position and of the intelligence which he had come to communicate; it was not *personal*—'twas nothing done to *Gammon himself;* it would never be renewed, unless he should renew his device. They were still the Aubreys of Yatton, and he, in their presence, still Mr. Gammon, of the firm of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, of Saffron Hill—and all this on the part of the Aubreys without the least effort, the least intention or consciousness. No, there had not been exhibited toward him the faintest indication of hauteur. On the contrary, he had been treated with perfect cordiality and frankness.

After he had been sitting with them for scarcely an hour, he detected Miss Aubrey stealthily glancing at her watch, and at once arose to take his departure, with a very easy

and graceful air, expressing an apprehension that he had trespassed upon their kindness. He was cordially assured to the contrary, but invited, neither to prolong his stay nor to renew his visit. Miss Aubrey made him, he thought, as he inclined toward her, *rather* a formal curtsy; and the tone of voice—soft and silvery—in which she said "Good-night, Mr. Gammon," fell on his eager ear and sank into his vexed heart like music. On quitting the house, a deep sigh of disappointment escaped him. As he gazed for a moment with longing eyes at the windows of the room in which Miss Aubrey was sitting, he felt profound depression of spirit; he had altogether *failed;* and he had a sort of cursed consciousness that on every account he deserved to fail. Her image was before his mind's eye every moment while he was threading his way back to his chambers. Arrived there he sat for an hour or two before the remnant of his fire, lost in a reverie; and sleep came not to his eyes till a late hour in the morning.

Mr. Gammon had some little difficulty in putting off Mr. Quirk from his purpose of enforcing the payment by Mr. Aubrey of the balance of his account. This was a considerable source of vexation to the old gentleman; but he had a far greater one in the final overthrow of his cherished hopes concerning his daughter's alliance with Titmouse. The paragraph in the *Aurora* announcing Mr. Titmouse's engagement to his brilliant relative, the Lady Cecilia, had emanated from the pen of Mr. Gammon, who had had several objects in view in giving early publicity to the event he announced in such courtly terms.

Mr. Quirk perused the paragraph with a somewhat flushed face. He had, in fact, for some time had grievous misgivings on the subject of his chance of becoming the father-in-law of his distinguished client, Mr. Titmouse; but now his faintest glimmering of hope was suddenly and completely extinguished, and the old gentleman felt quite desolate.

"It seems all up, Gammon, certainly—don't it?" said he with a flustered air.

"Indeed, my dear sir, it does! You have my sincerest sympathy," he replied speciously.

Tho Mr. Gammon thus sympathized with one of the gentle beings who had been "rifled of all their sweetness,"

I grieve to say that the other, Miss Tag-rag, never occupied his thoughts for one moment. He neither knew nor cared whether or not she was apprised of the destruction of all her fond hopes, by the paragraph which had appeared in the *Aurora*. In fact, he felt that he had really done enough, on the part of Mr. Titmouse, for his early friend and patron, Mr. Tag-rag, on whom the stream of fortune had set in strong and steady; and in short, Mr. Gammon knew that Mr. Tag-rag had received a substantial memento of his connection with Tittlebat Titmouse. In fact, how truly disinterested a man was Mr. Gammon toward all with whom he came in contact! What had he not done, as I have been saying, for the Tag-rags? What for Mr. Titmouse? What for the Earl of Dreddlington? What for Mr. Quirk, and even Snap?

Almost everything was going as he could wish. He was absolute and paramount over Titmouse, and could always secure his instant submission by virtue of the fearful and mysterious talisman which he occasionally flashed before his startled eyes. He had acquired great influence, also, over the Earl of Dreddlington—an influence which was constantly on the increase—and had seen come to pass an event which he judged to be of great importance to him—namely, the engagement between Titmouse and the Lady Cecilia. Yet there was one object which he had proposed to himself as supremely desirable—as the consummation of all his designs and wishes; I mean the obtaining the hand of Miss Aubrey—and in this he had yet a fearful misgiving of failure. But he was a man whose courage rose with every obstacle; and he fixedly resolved within himself to succeed, at any cost.

Gammon's reception by the Aubreys, in Vivian Street—kind and courteous tho it had surely been—had ever since rankled in his heart. Their abstaining from a request to him to prolong his stay or to renew his visit, he had noted at the time, and had ever since reflected upon with pique and discouragement. Nevertheless, he was resolved, at all hazards, to become at least an occasional visitor in Vivian Street. When a fortnight had elapsed without any further intimation to Mr. Aubrey concerning the dreaded balance due to the firm, Gammon ventured to call, for the purpose of assuring Mr. Aubrey that it was no mere temporary lull; that

he might divest his mind of all uneasiness on the subject. Could Mr. Aubrey be otherwise than grateful for such active and manifestly disinterested kindness? Again Gammon made his appearance at Mrs. Aubrey's tea-table—and was again

received with all the sweetness and frankness of manner which he had formerly experienced from her and Miss Aubrey.

Again he called, on some adroit pretext or another—and once heard Miss Aubrey's rich voice and exquisite performance on the piano. He became subject to emotions and impulses of a sort that he had never before experienced; yet, whenever

he retired from their fascinating society, he felt an aching void, as it were, within—he perceived the absence of all sympathy toward him; he felt indignant—but that did not quench the ardor of his aspirations. 'Tis hardly necessary to say that on every occasion Gammon effectually concealed the profound and agitating feelings which the sight of Miss Aubrey called forth in him; and what a tax was this upon his powers of concealment and self-control! How he laid himself out to amuse and interest them all! With what racy humor would he describe the vulgar absurdities of Titmouse —the stately eccentricities of the Dreddlingtons! With what eager and breathless interest was he listened to!

No man could make himself more unexceptionably agreeable than Gammon; and the ladies really took pleasure in his society; Kate being about as far from any notion of the real state of his feelings as of what was at that moment going on at the antipodes. Her reserve toward him sensibly lessened; why, indeed, should she feel it toward one of whom Dr. Tatham spoke so highly, and who appeared to warrant it? They often used to speak of him, and compare the impression which his person and conduct had produced in their minds; and in two points they agreed—that he exhibited anxiety to render himself agreeable; and that there was a certain *something* about his eye which none of them liked. It seemed as tho he had in a manner two natures; and that one of them was watching the effect of the efforts made by the other to beguile!

CHAPTER XXIII

DESCRIBES THE CAREER OF THE HERO IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, AND THE USEFUL AND ENTERTAINING CONTRIBUTION HE MADE TO A GREAT DEBATE

WHILE, however, the Fates thus seemed to frown upon the aspiring attempts of Gammon toward Miss Aubrey, they smiled benignantly enough upon Titmouse and his suit with the Lady Cecilia. The first shock over—which no lively sensibilities or strong feelings of her ladyship tended to protract—she began insensibly to get familiar with the person, manners, and character of her future lord, and reconciled to her fate. The serene intelligence of Lady Cecilia having satisfied her that "IT WAS HER FATE" to be married to Titmouse, she resigned herself to it tranquilly, calling in to her assistance divers co-operative reasons for the step she had agreed to take. She could thereby accomplish at all events one darling object of her papa's—the reunion of the long and unhappily-severed family interests. Then Yatton was certainly a delightful estate to be mistress of—a charming residence, and one which she might in all probability calculate on having pretty nearly to herself. His rent-roll was large and unencumbered, and would admit of a handsome jointure. On her accession to her own independent rank the odious name of Titmouse would disappear in the noble one of Lady Drelincourt, peeress in her own right, and representative of the oldest barony in the kingdom. Her husband would then become a mere cipher—no one would ever hear of him, or inquire after him, or think or care about him—a mere mote in the sunbeam of her own splendor. But above all, thank Heaven! there were many ways in which a *separation* might be brought about—never mind how soon after marriage—a step which was becoming quite a matter of course, and which

implied nothing derogatory to the character or lessening to the personal consequence of the lady—who indeed was almost, as of course, recognized as an object of sympathy, rather than of suspicion or scorn.

In addition to their previous gifts the crack-brained Fates still favored Mr. Titmouse by presently investing him with a character, and placing him in a position, calculated to give him personal dignity, and thereby redeem and elevate him in the estimation of his fastidious and lofty mistress. That was his election to a seat in Parliament—for the representation of the borough in which he had a commanding influence. His defeated opponent was no less than the Honorable Mr. Delamere, the son and heir of Lord De la Zouch, and the devoted lover of Kate.

The most interesting incident in the hotly contested election, in which Mr. Gammon, through his agents, spent his principal's money freely, was the famous speech of Mr. Titmouse on the hustings. Now, I happen to have a shorthand writer's notes of every word uttered by Titmouse, vainly prompted by Mr. Gammon, together with an account of the reception it met with; and I shall here give the reader, first, Mr. Titmouse's *real*, and, secondly, Mr. Titmouse's *supposed* speech as it appeared two days afterward in the columns of the *Yorkshire Stingo:*

"Look on *this* picture————————————and on THIS!"

Mr. Titmouse's ACTUAL Speech.

"GENTLEMEN: Most uncommon, unaccustomed as I am (*cheers*)—h a p p y —memorable—proudest—high honor—unworthy (*cheering*)—day of my life—important crisis—(*cheers*)—day gone by, and arrived—too late (*cheering*)—civil and religious liberty all over the world (*immense cheering, led off by Mr. Mudflint*). Yes, gentlemen—I would observe—it is unnecessary to say—passing of that truly glorious Bill—charter—no mistake—Britons never shall be slaves (*en-*

Mr. Titmouse's REPORTED Speech.

"Silence having been restored, Mr. Titmouse said that he feared it was but too evident that he was unaccustomed to scenes so exciting as the present one—that was one source of his embarrassment; but the greatest was the enthusiastic reception with which he was honored, and of which he owned himself quite unworthy (*cheers*). He agreed with the gentleman who had proposed him in so very able and powerful a speech (*cheers*), that we had arrived at a crisis in our national history (*cheer-*

thusiastic cheers)—Gentlemen, unaccustomed as I am to address an assembly of this—a-hem! (*hear! hear! hear! and cheers*)—civil and religious liberty all over the world (*cheers*)—yet the tongue can feel where the heart can not express the (*cheers*)—so help me——! universal suffrage and cheap and enlightened equality (*cries of 'That's it, lad!*)—which can never fear to see established in this country—(*cheers*)—if only true to—industrious classes and corn-laws—yes, gentlemen, I say corn-laws—for I am of op——(*hush! cries of 'Aye, lad, what dost say about* THEM?') working out the principles which conduced to the establishment a—a—a—civil and religious liberty of the press! (*cheers!*) and the working classes (*hush!*).—Gentlemen, unaccustomed as I am—well—at any rate—will you—I say—*will* you? (*vehement cries of 'No! No! Never!'*) unless you are true to yourselves! Gentlemen, without going into—Vote by Ballot (*cheers*) and quarterly Parliaments (*loud cheering*)—three polar stars of my public conduct—(here the great central banner was waved to and fro, amidst enthusiastic cheering)—and reducing the over-grown Church Establishment to a—difference between me and my honorable opponent (*loud cheers and groans*) I live among you (*cheers*)—spend my money in the borough (*cheers*)—no business to come here (*No, no!*)—right about, close borough, (*hisses!*)—patient attention, which I will not further trespass upon (*hear! hear! and loud cheering*)—full explanation—rush early to the—base, bloody, and brutal (*cheers*)—poll triumphant—extinguish forever (*cheers*). Gentlemen, these are my sentiments—wish you many happy—re—hem! a-hem—and by early displaying a determination to—(*cries of 'We will! we will!'*)—eyes of the *ing*)—a point at which it would be ruin to go back, while to stand still was impossible (*cheers*); and, therefore, there was nothing for it but to go forward (*great cheering*). He looked upon the passing of the Bill for giving Everybody Everything, as establishing an entirely new order of things (*cheers*), in which the people had been roused to a sense of their being the only legitimate source of power (*cheering*). They had, like Samson, tho weakened by the cruelty and torture of his tyrants, bowed down and broken into pieces the gloomy fabric of aristocracy. The words 'Civil and Religious Liberty' were now no longer a by-word and a reproach (*cheers*); but, as had been finely observed by the gentleman who had so eloquently proposed him to their notice, the glorious truth had gone forth to the ends of the earth, that no man was under any responsibility for his opinions or his belief, any more than for the shape of his nose (*loud cheers*). A spirit of tolerance, amelioration, and renovation was now abroad, actively engaged in repairing our defective and dilapidated constitution, the relic of a barbarous age—with some traces of modern beauty, but more of ancient ignorance and unsightliness (*cheers*). The great Bill he alluded to had roused the *masses* into political being (*immense cheering*) and made them sensible of the necessity of keeping down a rapacious and domineering oligarchy (*groans*). Was not the liberty of the press placed now upon an intelligible and imperishable basis?—Already were its purifying and invigorating influences perceptible, (*cheering*)—and he trusted that it would never cease to direct its powerful energies to the demolition of the many remaining barriers to the improvement of mankind (*cheers*).

whole country upon you—crisis of our national representation—patient attention—latest day of my life.—Gentlemen, yours truly——"

The corn-laws must be repealed, the taxes must be lowered, the army and navy reduced; vote by ballot and universal suffrage conceded, and the quarterly meeting of Parliament secured. Marriage must be no longer fenced about by religious ceremonials (*cheers*). He found that there were three words on his banner, which were worth a thousand speeches—*Peace*, *Retrenchment*, *Reform*—which, as had been happily observed by the gentleman who had so ably proposed him——"

[And so on for a column more; in the course of which there were really so many flattering allusions to the opening speech of the proposer of Titmouse, that it has often occurred to me as probable that Mr. Mudflint had supplied the above report of Mr. Titmouse's speech.]

Titmouse continued to occupy his very handsome apartments at the Albany. You might generally have seen him about ten o'clock in the morning (or say *twelve*, when his attendance was not required upon committees), reclining on his sofa, enveloped in a yellow figured satin dressing-gown, smoking an enormous hookah; with a little table before him with a decanter of gin, cold water, and a tumbler or two upon it. On a large round table near him lay a great number of dinner and evening cards, notes, letters, public and private, vote papers, and Parliamentary reports. Beside him on the sofa lay the last number of the *Sunday Flash*—to which, and to the *Newgate Calendar*, his reading was, in fact, almost entirely confined. Over the mantel-piece was a full-length portrait of Titmouse himself. His neck was bare, his ample shirt-collars being thrown down over his shoulders, and his face looking upward. The artist had labored hard to give it that fine indignant expression with which, in pictures of men of genius, they are generally represented as looking up toward the moon; but nature was too strong for him—his eye too accurate, and his brush too obedient to his eye; so that the only expression he could bring out was one of innocent and stupid wonder. A rich green mantle enveloped Titmouse's figure; and amidst its picturesque folds was visible his left hand, holding them together, and with a glittering ring on the first and last fingers.

In one corner of the room, on a table, were a pair of foils; and on the ground near them, three or four pairs of boxing-gloves. On another table lay a guitar—on another a violin; on both of which delightful instruments he was taking almost daily lessons. Tho the room was both elegantly and expensively furnished (according to the taste of its former occupant), it was now redolent—as were Mr. Titmouse's clothes—of the odors of tobacco-smoke and gin-and-water. Here it was that Mr. Titmouse would often spend hour after hour, boxing with Billy Bully, the celebrated prize-fighter and pickpocket; or, when somewhat far gone in liquor, playing cribbage or put with his valet—an artful, impudent fellow who had gained influence over him.

As for the House, Modesty (the twin-sister of Merit) kept Mr. Titmouse for a long time very quiet there. He saw the necessity of watching attentively everything that passed around him, in order to become practically familiar with the routine of business, before he ventured to step forward into action and distinguish himself. He had not been long, however, thus prudently occupied, when an occasion presented itself, of which he availed himself with all the bold felicitous promptitude of genius. He suddenly saw that he should be able to bring into play an early accomplishment of his—an accomplishment which, when acquiring, how little he dreamed to what signal uses it might be afterward turned! In early life he used to amuse himself by imitating the cries of cats, the crowing of cocks, the squeaking of pigs, the braying of donkeys, and the yelping of curs; in which matters he became at length so great a proficient as to attract the admiring attention of passers-by and to afford great amusement to the circles in which he visited.

Now there was, on a certain night, about three months after Titmouse had been in the House, a kind of pitched battle between the Ministry and their formidable opponents; in which the speakers on each side did their best to prove (and in the opinion of many, *successfully*) that their opponents were apostates; utterly worthless; destitute alike of public and private virtue; unfit to govern; and unworthy of the confidence of the country, which aforesaid country was indeed in happy plight in possessing a Parliament unanimous in one thing at least—viz., its own worthlessness. My Lord

Bulfinch rose late on the third evening of the debate—never had been seen so full a House during the session—and in a long and able speech contended (first) that the opposite side were selfish, ignorant, and dishonest; and (secondly) that the Ministers had only imitated their example. He was vehemently cheered from time to time, and sat down amidst a tempest of applause.

Up then rose the ex-Minister and leader of the opposition, and in a very few moments there was scarce a sound to be heard, except the delicious voice—at once clear, harmonious, distinct in utterance, and varied in intonation—of incomparably the finest Parliamentary orator of the day, Mr. VIVID.

After a two hours' speech, of uncommon power and brilliance, Mr. Vivid wound up with a rapid and striking recapitulation of the leading points of his policy when in power, which, he contended, were in triumphant contrast with those of his successors, which were wavering, inconsistent, perilous to every national interest, and in despicable subservience to the vilest and lowest impulses. "And now, sir," said Mr. Vivid, turning to the Speaker, and then directing a bold and indignant glance of defiance at Lord Bulfinch, "does the noble lord opposite talk of *impeachment?* I ask him in the face of this House, and of the whole country, whose eyes are fixed upon it with anxiety and agitation, will he presume to repeat his threat? or will any one on his behalf! Sir, I pause for a reply!"—And he did—several seconds elapsing in dead silence, which was presently, however, broken in a manner that was perfectly unprecedented, and most astounding. 'Twas a reply to his question; but such as, had he anticipated it, he would never have put the question, or paused for its answer.

"*Cock-a-doodle-do-o-o-o!*" issued, with inimitable fidelity of tone and manner, from immediately behind Lord Bulfinch, who started from his seat as if he had been shot. Every one started; Mr. Vivid recoiled a pace or two from the table—and then a universal peal of laughter echoed from all quarters of the House, not excepting even the strangers' gallery. The Speaker was convulsed and could not rise to call "order." Lord Bulfinch laughed himself almost into fits; even those immediately behind Mr. Vivid were giving way to un-

controllable laughter, at so comical and monstrous an issue. Vivid himself tried for a moment to join in the laugh, but in vain; he was terribly disconcerted and confounded. This frightful and disgusting incident had done away with the effect of his whole speech; and in twenty-four hours' time

the occurrence would be exciting laughter and derision in every corner of the kingdom.

"Order! order! order!" cried the Speaker, his face red and swollen with scarce subdued laughter. Several times

Mr. Vivid attempted to resume, only, however, occasioning renewed laughter. Still he persevered, and, with much presence of mind, made a pointed and witty allusion to Rome saved by the cackling of a goose, in which manner he said the Ministers hoped that night to be saved. 'Twas, however, plainly useless; and after a moment or two's pause of irresolution, yielding to his fate, with visible vexation he abruptly concluded his observations, gathered hastily together his papers, and resumed his seat and his hat—a signal for renewed laughter and triumphant cheering from the ministerial side of the House. 'Twas my friend Mr. Titmouse that had worked this wonder and entirely changed the fate of the day. The debate came abruptly to a close, and the opposition were beaten by a majority of *a hundred and thirty*—which really looked something like a working majority.

This happy occurrence at once brought Mr. Titmouse into notice and very great favor with his party. Well, indeed, it might, for he had become a most powerful auxiliary, and need it be added how dreaded and detested he was by their opponents? How could it be otherwise, when even their leading speakers—who could scarcely ever afterward venture on anything a little out of the common way, a little higher flight than usual—were in momentary apprehension of being suddenly brought down by some such disgusting and ludicrous interruption as the one I have mentioned, indicating the effect which the speaker was producing upon—a cat, a donkey, a cock, or a puppy? Ah, me! what a sheep's-eye each of them cast, as he went on, toward Titmouse? And if ever he was observed to be absent, there was a sensible improvement in the tone and spirit of the opposition speakers. The ministerial journals all over the country worked the joke well; and in their leading articles against any of Mr. Vivid's speeches, would "sum up all in one memorable word—'*Cock-a-doodle-doo!*'"

As is generally the case, the signal success of Mr. Titmouse brought into the field a host of imitators in the House, and their performances, inferior tho they were, becoming more and more frequent, gave quite a new character to the proceedings of that dignified deliberative assembly. At length, however, it was found necessary to pass a resolution of the House against such practises; and it was entered on the journals that henceforth no honorable member should inter-

rupt business by whistling, singing, or imitating the sounds of animals or making any other disgusting noise whatsoever.

The political importance thus acquired by Mr. Titmouse—and which he enjoyed till the passing of the above resolution, by which it was cut up root and branch—had naturally a very elevating effect upon him; as you might have perceived had you only once seen him swaggering along the House to his seat behind the front Treasury bench, dressed in his usual style of fashion, and with his quizzing-glass stuck into his eye. His circle of acquaintance was extending every day; he became a very welcome guest, as an object of real curiosity. He was not a man, however, to be always enjoying the hospitality of others without at least offering a return; and at the suggestion of an experienced friend in the House, he commenced a series of "Parliamentary dinners," at the Gliddington Hotel. They went off with much *éclat*, and were duly chronicled in the daily journals, as thus:

"On Saturday, Mr. Titmouse, M.P., entertained (his third dinner given this session), at the Gliddington Hotel, the following (amongst others) distinguished members of the House of Commons: Lord Nothing Nowhere, Sir Simper Silly, Mr. Flummery, Mr. O'Gibbet, Mr. Outlaw, Lord Beetle, Colonel Quod, and a dozen others."

Mr. Titmouse, at length, thought himself warranted in inviting Lord Bulfinch!—and the SPEAKER!!—and LORD FIREBRAND (the Foreign Secretary); all of whom, however, very politely declined, pleading previous engagements. I can hardly, however, give Mr. Titmouse the credit of these latter proceedings, which were, in fact, suggested to him, in the first instance, by two or three young wags in the House (who, barring a little difference in the way of bringing up, were every whit as great fools and coxcombs as himself, and equally entitled to the confidence of their favored constituencies and of the country) as so admirably calculated for the purpose of practical legislation, and that remodeling of the institutions of the country upon which the new House of Commons seemed bent.

It is not difficult to understand the pleasure which my little friend experienced in dispensing the little favors and cour-

tesies, such as orders for the gallery, and franks, to those who applied for them; for all his show of feeling it a "*bore*" to be asked. 'Twas these little matters which, as it were, brought home to him a sense of his dignity, and made him *feel* the possession of station and authority. I know not but that the following application was more gratifying to him than any which he received:

"T. Tag-rag's best respects to T. Titmouse, Esq., M.P., and begs to say how *greatly* he will account ye favor of obtaining an order to be Admitted to the Gallery of the House of Commons for to-morrow night, to hear the debate on the Bill for Doing away with the *Nuisance* of Dustmen's cries of a morning.

"With Mrs. T.'s & daughter's respectful compts.

"T. TITMOUSE, ESQ., M.P."

On receiving this, Titmouse looked out for the finest sheet of glossy extra-superfine gilt Bath post, scented, and in a fine flourishing hand wrote as follows:

"Please to admit ye Barer To The Galery of The House of Commons.—T. TITMOUSE. Wednesday, March 6th, 18—."

CHAPTER XXIV

SHOWS HOW LORD DREDDLINGTON SPECULATES IN STOCKS AND HOW THE HERO ADVENTURES IN MATRIMONY

TITMOUSE's marriage with the Lady Cecilia had, as usual, been prematurely announced in the newspapers several times, as on the eve of taking place. Their courtship went on very easily and smoothly. Neither of them seemed *anxious* for the other's society, tho they contrived to evince, in the presence of others, a decent degree of gratification at meeting each other. He did all which he was instructed it was necessary for a man of fashion to do. He attended her and the Earl to the opera repeatedly, as also to other places of fashionable resort; he danced with her occasionally; but to tell the truth, it was only at the vehement instance of the Earl, her father, that she ever consented to stand up with one whose person, whose carriage, whose motions were so unutterably vulgar and ridiculous as those of Mr. Titmouse, who was yet her affianced husband. He had made her several times rather expensive presents of jewelry, and would have purchased for her a great stock of clothing (of which he justly considered himself an excellent judge) if she would have permitted it. He had, moreover, been a constant guest at the Earl's table, where he was under greater restraint than anywhere else. Of such indiscretions and eccentricities as I have just been recording, they knew, or were properly *supposed* to know, nothing. 'Twas not for them to have their eyes upon him while sowing his wild oats—so thought the Earl; who, however, had frequent occasion for congratulating himself in respect of Mr. Titmouse's political celebrity.

So far as his dress went, Lady Cecilia contrived, through the interference of the Earl and of Mr. Gammon (for whom she had conceived a singular respect), to abate a *little* of its fantasic absurdity and execrable vulgarity. Nothing, however, seemed capable of effecting any material change in *the*

man, altho his continued intercourse with refined society could hardly fail to effect *some* advantageous change in his *manners*. As for anything further, Tittlebat Titmouse remained the same vulgar, heartless, presumptuous, ignorant creature he had ever been.

Many and anxious, it may be easily believed, had been the conferences and negotiations between the Earl, Mr. Titmouse, and Mr. Gammon with reference to the settlement to be made on Lady Cecilia. The sum finally determined upon was £3,000 a-year—surely a very substantial "*consideration*" for her "faithful *promise*" to be made, by and by, at the altar—and which, moreover, she conceived she had a prospect of having entirely to herself—really "for her *separate* use, exempt from the control, debts, and engagements of her said intended husband." I am sorry to say that Lady Cecilia clung to the prospect of an almost immediate *separation;* which, she learned from several confidential friends, some of whom were qualified by personal experience to offer an opinion, was a very easy matter to secure, becoming daily more frequently granted on the ground of incompatibility of temper.

The Earl was also greatly supported, at this period of vexation and disappointment, by the manly and indignant sympathy of—Mr. Gammon, who had succeeded in gaining a prodigious ascendency over the Earl, who, on the sudden death of his own solicitor, adopted Gammon in his stead; and infinitely rejoiced his lordship was to have thus secured the services of one who possessed an intellect at once so practical, masterly, and energetic; who had formed so high an estimate of his lordship's powers; and whom his lordship's condescending familiarity never for one moment caused to lose sight of the vast distance and difference between them. He appeared, moreover, to act between Titmouse and the Earl with the scrupulous candor and fidelity of a high-minded person, consciously placed in a situation of peculiar delicacy and responsibility. At the least, he seemed exceedingly anxious to secure Lady Cecilia's interests; and varied—or *appeared* to vary—the arrangements according to every suggestion of his lordship. The Earl was satisfied that Gammon was disposed to make Titmouse go much further toward meeting the Earl's wishes in the matter of the settlements than of his own

accord he would have felt disposed to go; in fact, Gammon evinced great anxiety to place her ladyship in that position to which her high pretensions so justly entitled her.

But this was not the only mode by which he augmented and secured his influence over the weak old peer. He had enabled his lordship, as it were, "to strike a blow in a new hemisphere," and at once evince his fitness for the conduct of important and complicated affairs of business, and acquire an indefinite augmentation of fortune and also great influence and popularity.

England, about the time I am speaking of, was smitten with a sort of mercantile madness, which showed itself in the shape of a monstrous passion for JOINT-STOCK COMPANIES. John Bull all of a sudden took it into his head that no commercial undertaking of the least importance could any longer be carried on by means of *individual* energy, capital, and enterprise. He discovered that he had had a glimmering of this great truth from the first moment that a private *partnership* had been adopted; and it remained only to follow out the principle—to convert a private into a public partnership and call it a "joint-stock company." This bright idea of John's produced prompt and prodigious results—a hundred *joint-stock companies* "rose like an exhalation" in the metropolis alone, within one twelvemonth's time.

Into affairs of this description, Mr. Gammon, who soon saw the profit to be made out of them, if skilfully worked, plunged with the energy and excitement of a gamester. He drew in Mr. Quirk after him; and as they could together command the ears of several enterprising capitalists in the City, they soon had their hands full of business, and launched two or three very brilliant speculations. Mr. Gammon himself drew up their "*prospectuses*,"and in a style which must have tempted the very devil himself into venturing half his capital in the undertaking! One was a scheme for obtaining *pure fresh water* from the SEA, and converting the salt or brine thrown off in the operation *instanter* into *gunpowder!* This undertaking was the first that Gammon brought under the notice of the Earl of Dreddlington, whom he so completely dazzled by his description, both of the signal service to be conferred upon the country and the princely revenue to be derived from it to those early entering into the speculation,

that his lordship intimated rather an anxious wish to be connected with it.

"Good gracious, sir!" said his lordship, with an air of wonder, "to what a pitch is science advancing! When will human ingenuity end? Sir, I doubt not that one of these days *everything* will be found out!"

"Certainly—I feel the full force of your lordship's very striking observation," replied Gammon, who had listened to him with an air of delighted deference.

"Sir, this is a truly astonishing discovery! Yet, I give you my honor, sir, I have often thought that something of the kind was very desirable, as far as the obtaining fresh water from salt water was concerned, and I have wondered whether it could ever be practicable: but I protest the latter part of the discovery—the conversion of the brine into gunpowder—is—is—sir, I say it is—astounding; it is more; it is very interesting, in a picturesque and patriotic point of view. Only think, sir, of our vessels gathering gunpowder and fresh water from the sea they are sailing over! Sir, the discovery deserves a subsidy! This must in due time be brought before Parliament." His lordship got quite excited; and Gammon, watching his opportunity, intimated the pride and pleasure it would give him to make his lordship the patron of the gigantic undertaking.

"Sir—sir—you do me—infinite honor," quoth the Earl, quite flustered by the suddenness of the proposal.

"As there will be, of course, your lordship sees, several great capitalists concerned, I must for form's sake consult them before any step is taken; but I flatter myself, my lord, that there can be but one opinion, when I name to them the possibility of our being honored with your lordship's name and influence."

Out went forthwith, all over the country, the advertisements and prospectuses of the new company, which could boast such commanding names as cast most of its sister companies into the shade—*e.g.*, "The Right Honorable the Earl of DREDDLINGTON, G.C.B., F.R.S., F.A.S., etc., etc.;" "The most Noble the DUKE of TANTALLAN, K.T., etc., etc.;" "The Most Honorable the MARQUESS of MARMALADE, etc., etc., etc." The capital to be one million, in ten thousand shares of one hundred pounds each. Lord Dreddlington was presented with

a hundred shares as a mark of respect and gratitude from the leading shareholders; moreover, his lordship took two hundred shares besides, and prevailed on various of his friends to do the same.

In less than three weeks' time the shares had risen to £40 premium, and then Mr. Gammon so represented matters to his lordship as to induce him to part with his shares, which he found no difficulty in doing—and thereby realize a clear profit of £12,000. This seemed to the Earl rather the effect of magic than of an every-day mercantile adventure. His respect for Gammon rose with everything he heard of that gentleman, or saw him do; and his lordship allowed himself to be implicitly guided by him in all things. Under his advice, accordingly, the Earl became interested in several other similar speculations. Several of his friends cautioned him, now and then, against committing himself to such novel and extensive speculations, in which he might incur, he was reminded, dangerous liabilities; but his magnificent reception of such interference soon caused their discontinuance. The Earl felt himself safe in the hands of Mr. Gammon, forming an equal and a very high estimate of his ability and integrity.

His lordship's attention having been thus directed to such subjects—to the mercantile interests of this great country—he soon began to take a vast interest in the discussion of such subjects in the House, greatly to the surprise and edification of many of his brother peers. Absorbing, however, as were these and similar occupations, they were almost altogether suspended as soon as a day—and that not a distant one—had been fixed upon for the marriage of his daughter with Mr. Titmouse. From that moment the old man could scarcely bear her out of his presence, following and watching all her movements with a peculiar, tho still a stately solicitude and tenderness. Frequent, earnest, and dignified were his interviews with Titmouse—his representations as to the invaluable treasure that was about to be intrusted to him in the Lady Cecilia—the last direct representative of the most ancient noble family in the kingdom.

Early in the forenoon of Tuesday, the 1st of April, 18—, there were indications in the neighborhood of Lord Dreddlington's house in Grosvenor Square that an aristocratic wedding was about to be celebrated. Lady Cecilia's bridesmaids,

and one or two other ladies, the Duke and Duchess of Tantallan, and a few others who were to accompany the party to church, made their appearance about eleven o'clock; and shortly afterward dashed up Mr. Titmouse's cab, in which sat that gentleman enveloped in a magnificent green cloak, which concealed the splendor of his personal appearance. He had been engaged at his toilet since five o'clock that morning, and the results were not unworthy of the pains which had been taken to secure them. Tho he tried to look at his ease, his face was rather pale and his manner a little flurried. As for the bride—she had slept scarcely a quarter of an hour the whole night. When at length she had completed her toilet, what a figure did her cheval-glass present to her! The dress—rich white satin—a long and beautiful blond lace veil—and a delicate wreath of orange-blossoms—was that of a bride, certainly; but was the haggard countenance that of a bride? When, attended by her bridesmaids and Miss Macspleuchan, she made her appearance in the drawing-room, the Earl of Dreddlington approached her and saluted her with silent tenderness. Then Titmouse came up, with a would-be familiar air—"Hope you're quite well, dearest, this happy day," said he, and kissed her gloved hand. She made him no reply, stepped back, and sank upon the sofa; and presently the carriages were announced to be in readiness. The Earl led her down, followed by her two bridesmaids, and entered the first carriage, which then drove off to St. George's Church; Titmouse and the rest of the party immediately following. The ceremony was performed by the Bishop of Barnard-Castle, an old friend and indeed a distant relation of Lord Dreddlington's. Titmouse was pale and flushed by turns, and looked frightened—behaving, however, with more sedateness than I should have expected. Lady Cecilia leaned, when she could, against the rails; and repeated her few allotted words in a voice scarcely audible. When Titmouse affixed the ring upon her finger, she trembled and shed tears—averting her countenance from him, and at length concealing it entirely in her pocket-handkerchief. She looked indeed the image of misery. The Earl of Dreddlington maintained a countenance of rigid solemnity.

A splendid *déjeuner à la fourchette* was prepared, and a very brilliant party attended to pay their respects to the bride and

" Hope you're quite
well, dearest, this
happy day "

bridegroom and the Earl of Dreddlington; and about two o'clock the Lady Cecilia withdrew to prepare for her journey, which was to Poppleton Hall, her father's residence in Hertfordshire, where they were to spend their honeymoon. She had never shown so much emotion in her life as when she parted with Miss Macspleuchan and her bridesmaids—being several times on the verge of hysterics. Mr. Titmouse's traveling chariot—a dashing chocolate-colored one, with four horses—stood at the door, her ladyship's maid and his valet seated in the rumble. Some hundred people stood round to see the happy pair set off on their journey of happiness.

The Earl led down Lady Cecilia, followed by Titmouse, who had exchanged his hat for a gaudy traveling-cap with a gold band round it! Lady Cecilia, with drooping head and feeble step, suffered the Earl, whom she kissed fervently, to place her in the chariot, when she burst into a flood of tears. Then Mr. Titmouse shook hands cordially with his distinguished father-in-law—popped into the chariot—the steps were doubled up—the door closed—the side-blinds were drawn down by Mr. Titmouse; "All's right!" cried one of the servants, and away rolled the carriage-and-four, which, quickening its speed, was soon out of sight. Lady Cecilia remained in a sort of stupor for some time, and sat silent and motionless in the corner of the chariot; but Titmouse had now become lively enough, having had the benefit of some dozen glasses of champagne.

"Ah, my lovely gal—dearest gal of my heart!" he exclaimed fondly, at the same time kissing her cold cheeks and putting his arm round her waist, "now you're all my own! 'Pon my soul, isn't it funny? We're man and wife! By Jove, I never loved you so much as now, ducky! eh?" Again he pressed his lips to her cold cheek.

"Don't, don't, I beg," said she faintly, "I'm not well;" and she feebly tried to disengage herself from his rude and boisterous embrace: while her drooping head and ashy cheek fully corroborated the truth of her statement. In this state she continued for the whole of the first stage. When they stopped to change horses, says Titmouse, starting up—having very nearly dropped asleep—"Cicely, as you're so uncommon ill, hadn't you better have your maid in, and I'll sit on

the box?—It would be a devilish deal more comfortable for you—eh?"

"Oh, I should feel *so* obliged if you would, Mr. Titmouse!" she replied faintly. It was done as she wished. Titmouse enveloped himself in his cloak, and, having lit a cigar, mounted the box, and smoked all the way till they reached the Hall.

They spent about a fortnight at Poppleton Hall, and then went on to Yatton; and if the reader be at all curious to know how MR. AND LADY CECILIA TITMOUSE commenced their matrimonial career, I am able, in some measure, to gratify him, by the sight of a letter addressed by the Lady Cecilia, some time afterward, to one of her confidential friends:

"DEAR BLANCHE:

"* * * Fate should have something pleasant in store for me, since it has made me most unhappy now, but it is some consolation that I took this step purely to please my papa, who seemed to think it was a thing that *ought* to be done: You know he always fretted himself greatly about the division of the family interests, and so on; and when he proposed to me this truly unhappy alliance, I supposed it was my duty to comply, as indeed he said it was. I am sure but for this I should never have dreamed of such a thing as doing what I did. If fate chose us to come together, it ought surely to have better fitted us to each other; for really, dear Blanche (*entre nous*), you cannot *think* what a *creature it is*. He has very nasty habits besides, namely picking his teeth, eating with his knife, etc., etc., and he is continually running his fingers through his horrid hair, to curl it, and carries a comb with him, and several times has combed his hair in the carriage just before we got out at the door of the place we were to dine, and he always takes too much wine, and comes up the very last to the drawing-room, and sometimes is *in such a state*. I am resolved I will never come home with him from dinner again, even if I ever go out again with him. He goes on in such a shameful and unfeeling and disrespectful way before the vicar (Dr. Tatham, a very nice person, who, I am sure, by his looks, *feels for me*) that Dr. T. will scarcely ever come near us under one pretense or

another. I am sorry to tell you Mr. Titmouse has no more *sense of religion* than a cat or a dog, and I understand he has left a great many of his election bills unpaid (so that he is very unpopular) and positively, dear Blanche! the diamond spray the creature bought me turns out to be only *paste!!* He never goes to church, and has got up one or two dog-fights in the village, and he is hated by the tenants, for he is always raising their rents. I forgot to mention, by the way, he had the monstrous assurance one morning to *open my letters!*—and said he had a right to do so, with his own wife, for we were one (I hate to write it), so I have had a letter-bag of my own, which is always delivered into my own room. O Heavens! the idea of his succeeding to the barony! but to be sure you have no notion how hard he lives: and (*entre nous*) the other day the doctor was called in to him and had to put leeches on his head, and certainly (*entre nous, dearest* B.) I understand such things sometimes do often lead to very *sad results*, but, however, he certainly seems better now. My papa knows nothing of all this yet, but he soon must, and I am confident a *separation* must ensue, or I shall die or go mad. Oh, how thankful I should * * *! But I could fill two or three sheets more in this way, and yet I have not told you a hundredth part of his *gaucheries*, but really you must be quite sick of hearing of them. If he will but leave me here when he goes up to town, you will surely pay me your promised visit—and I will tell you many more miserable things. In the mean while, O dearest B., how I envy you being single, and wish I were so again!—*Be sure* you burn this when you have read it—and believe me, your unhappy CECILIA."

A dull and phlegmatic disposition, like that of Lady Cecilia, must have been roused and stung, indeed, before she could have attained to such bitterness of expression as is occasionally to be met with in the above communication. Tho it shadows forth, with painful distinctness, several of the disadvantageous features of Mr. Titmouse's character and conduct, there were far darker ones, with which its miserable writer had not then become acquainted. I shall but hastily glance at one of them; viz., that he was at that moment keeping a mistress in town, and commencing the seduction of a

farmer's daughter in the neighborhood of Yatton! Execrable little miscreant!—why should I defile my paper by further specifying his gross misdeeds, or dwelling upon their sickening effects on the mind and feelings of the weak woman who could suffer herself to be betrayed into such a union?—But is she the only one that has done so?

Had Lady Cecilia been a woman of acute perceptions or lively sensibilities, she must have fled from her sufferings—she must have gone mad or committed suicide. As it was, dull as was her temperament, when the more odious points of Titmouse's character and habits were forced upon her notice by the close and constant contiguity of daily intercourse, the reflection that such must be the case *for the remainder of their lives* became even hourly more intolerable and roused into existence feelings of active hatred and disgust; she became hourly more alive to the real horrors of her position. The slender stay she had sought for in the reflection that she had incurred all by a dutiful submission to her father's wishes, quickly gave way; *she knew that it was false!*

As for Titmouse, he had never cared one straw about anything beyond becoming the husband of the future Baroness of Drelincourt—and that on account not merely of the dignity and splendor conferred upon him by such an alliance with the last remaining member of the elder branch of his ancient family, but also because of the grave and repeated assurances of Mr. Gammon that it was in some mysterious way essential to the tenure of his own position. He made no secret at all in his own peculiar visiting circles of his wishes that the Earl's increasing age and infirmities might quicken, and Lady Cecilia's apparently delicate health decline apace—and thus accelerate the accession of Mr. Titmouse to the barony of Drelincourt.

After they had spent about a month at Yatton, his urgent Parliamentary duties required Mr. Titmouse to tear himself from that lovely seclusion—that "bower of bliss"—and resume his arduous post in the House. Tho Lady Cecilia would have vastly preferred being left behind at Yatton, decency seemed to require that the bride and bridegroom should make their reappearance in the world jointly, and she was therefore compelled to accompany him to town; and they were very soon duly established in his new residence in Park Lane.

In a moment they were both in the great whirling world of fashion. Lord Dreddlington gave a series of dinner parties on their account, as did several of their distinguished kinsfolk and friends; and in due time their hospitalities were returned by Mr. Titmouse. His first dinner party went off with great *éclat*, no fewer than four peers of the realm, with their ladies, being among his guests. Mr. Titmouse led down to dinner the gigantic Duchess of Tantallan, blazing with diamonds, his Grace the Duke bringing up the rear with the Lady Cecilia—and the splendid affair was duly announced the ensuing morning in the obsequious columns of the *Aurora*.

For some little time Mr. Titmouse occupied his novel and dazzling position with an approach toward decorum and self-denial; but, as he became familiar with it, his old tastes revived—and Lady Cecilia and her friends were gratified, for instance, while in the drawing-room after dinner, by catching occasional sounds of Mr. Titmouse's celebrated imitations of animals, which once or twice, when considerably elevated, he insisted upon giving on his re-entering the drawing-room! Indeed, he spared no pains to acquire the power of pleasing society by the display of rare accomplishments; for which purpose he took lessons every other day in the *art diabolic*—*i.e.* in conjuring; in which he soon became an expert proficient, and could play marvelous tricks upon cards and with dice, eat pocket-handkerchiefs, cause wine-glasses visibly to sink through solid tables, and perform sundry other astounding feats.

CHAPTER XXV

DESCRIBES THE IMPOTENT RAGE OF THE HERO AT A MOST EXTRAORDINARY DEMAND BY MR. GAMMON, AND HIS VAIN ATTEMPT AT RESISTANCE AGAINST IT

It was about half-past eleven o'clock one day toward the latter end of June that Mr. Titmouse, having finished breakfast, had entered his library to enjoy undisturbed the luxury of his hookah. He had just leaned back his head, and with an air of tranquil enjoyment very slowly expelled a mouthful of smoke, when a servant announced the arrival of a visitor —Mr. Gammon.

"How d'ye do, Gammon!—early, eh?" commenced Titmouse without stirring, and with infinite composure and *nonchalance*.

"My dear sir," began Gammon, abruptly, with a most serious countenance, "I am now about to make a communication to you, which you will never forget to the day of your death. Are you prepared to receive it?"

"Oh, yes!—Never so wide awake in my life! O Lord! fire away——"

"Well, my dear Titmouse, then I will proceed. I will not enjoin you to secrecy, because you can not disclose it to any mortal man but at the peril of immediate and utter ruin."

"'Pon my soul, most amazing! Demme, Mr. Gammon, you frighten me out of my wits!" said Titmouse, turning paler and paler.

"Consider for a moment. You are now a member of Parliament; the unquestioned owner of a fine estate; the husband of a lady of very high rank—the last direct representative of one of the proudest and most ancient of the noble families of Great Britain; you yourself are next but one in succession to almost the oldest barony in the kingdom; in fact, in all human probability you are the next Lord Drelincourt; and all this through *me*." He paused.

"Well—excuse me, Mr. Gammon—but I hear;—tho—ahem!

you're—meaning no offense—I can't for the life and soul of me tell what the devil it is you're driving at," said Titmouse, twisting his finger into his hair, and gazing at Gammon with intense anxiety.

"Yet you are *really* no more entitled to *be* what you seem or to possess what you at present possess—than—the little wretch that last swept your chimneys here!"

The hookah dropped out of Titmouse's hand upon the floor, and he made no effort to pick it up, but sat staring at Gammon, with cheeks almost as white as his shirt-collar, and in blank dismay.

"I perceive that you are agitated, Mr. Titmouse," said Gammon kindly.

"By Jove—I should think so!" replied Titmouse faintly; but he tried to assume an incredulous smile—in vain, however; and to such a pitch had his agitation reached that he rose, opened a cabinet near him, and taking out from it a brandy-flask and a wineglass, poured it out full and drank it off. "You a'n't *joking*, Mr. Gammon, eh?" Again he attempted a sickly smile.

"God forbid, Mr. Titmouse!"

"Well—but," faltered Titmouse, "*why* a'n't I entitled to it all! Hasn't the law given it to me? And can't the law do as it likes?"

"No one on earth knows the *what* and the *why* of this matter but myself; and, if you choose, no one ever shall; nay, I will take care, if you come this morning to my terms, to deprive even myself of all means of proving what I can *now* prove, at any moment I choose."

"Lord, Mr. Gammon!" ejaculated Titmouse, passing his hand hastily over his damp forehead—his agitation visibly increasing. "What's to be the figure?" he faltered presently, and looked as if he dreaded to hear the answer.

"If you mean, what are my *terms*—I will at once tell you:—they are terms on which I shall peremptorily insist; they have been long fixed in my own mind; I am quite inflexible; so help me Heaven, I will not vary from them a hair's-breath. I require first to sit in Parliament for Yatton at the next election, and afterward alternately with yourself; and secondly, that you immediately grant me an annuity for my life of two thousand pounds a year on your——"

Titmouse sprang from the sofa, dashing his fist on the table and uttering a frightful imprecation. He stood for a moment, and then threw himself desperately at full length on the sofa, muttering the same execration that had first issued from his lips. Gammon moved not a muscle, but fixed a steadfast eye on Titmouse; the two might have been compared to the affrighted rabbit and the deadly boa-constrictor.

"It's all a swindle!—a d——d swindle!" at length he exclaimed, starting up into a sitting posture, and almost grinning defiance at Gammon.

"You're a swindler!" he exclaimed vehemently.

"Possibly—but *you*, sir, are a BASTARD," replied Gammon calmly.

"It's a lie!—It's all a lie!" he gasped.

"Sir, you are a *bastard*," repeated Gammon bitterly, and extending his forefinger threateningly toward Titmouse. Then he added with sudden vehemence: "Do you presume to tell me I lie? You base-born cur!" A lightning glance shot from his eye; but he restrained himself. Titmouse sat at length as if petrified, while Gammon proceeded: "*You* the owner of Yatton? You the next Lord Drelincourt? No more than the helper in your stables! One breath of mine blights you forever—as an impostor to be kicked out of society—perhaps to be transported for life. Gracious Heavens! what will the Earl of Dreddlington say when he hears that his sole daughter and heiress is married to a—— It will kill *him*, or he will kill *you*."

"Two can play at that," whispered Titmouse faintly—indeed almost inarticulately. There was nearly a minute's pause.

"No—but *is* it all true?—honor!" inquired Titmouse in a very subdued voice.

"As God is my witness!" replied Gammon.

"Well," exclaimed Titmouse, after a prodigious sigh, "then, at any rate, you're in for it with me; you said just now you'd done it all. Ah, ha! I recollect, Mr. Gammon! I should no more have thought of it *myself*—Lord! then—what d'ye say to *that*, Mr. Gammon?"

"Alas, sir! it will not avail you," replied Gammon, with a fearful smile; "for I never made the dreadful discovery of

your illegitimacy till it was too late—till at least two months after I had put you into possession of Yatton!"

"Ah—I don't know—but—why didn't you tell Lord Dreddlington? Why did you let me marry Lady Cicely? By Jove, but it's *you* he'll kill," quoth Titmouse, eagerly.

"Yes!—Alas! I ought to have done so," replied Mr. Gammon with a profound sigh. "It may not be too late to make his lordship *some* amends. I may save his *title* from degradation. Lord Drelincourt——"

"O Lord!" ejaculated Titmouse involuntarily and almost unconsciously, staring stupidly at Gammon, who continued, with a renewed sigh: "Yes, I *ought* to have told his lordship —but I own—I was led away by feelings of pity—of affection for *you*—and, alas! is this the return?"

"Well, you shouldn't have come down on one so suddenly all at once—how can a man—eh? Such *horrid* news!"

"It has cost me, sir, infinitely greater pain to tell you than it has cost you to hear it!"

"By the living Jove!" exclaimed Titmouse, starting up with a sort of recklessness, and pouring out and tossing off a large glass of brandy; "it *can't* be true—it's all a dream! I—I a'n't—I *can't* be a bas—— Perhaps *you're* all this while the true heir, Mr. Gammon?" he added briskly, and snapped his fingers at his companion.

"No, sir, I am not," replied Gammon calmly; "but let me tell you, *I know where he is to be found*, Mr. Titmouse! Do you commission me to go in search of him?" he inquired, suddenly fixing his bright, penetrating eye upon Titmouse, who instantly stammered out: "O Lord! By Jove! no, no!"

Gammon could scarcely suppress a bitter smile, so ludicrous were the look and tone of Titmouse.

"You shouldn't have let me spend such a lot of money, if it wasn't mine all the while——"

"The estate was, in a manner, Mr. Titmouse, in my *gift;* and in pitching upon you, sir, out of several, I had imagined that I had chosen a gentleman—a man grateful and honorable——"

"'Pon my solemn soul, so I *am!*" interrupted Titmouse eagerly.

"I had but to scrawl a line or two with my pen, the very first day that I saw you at the shop of Mr. Tag-rag—and

there, sir—or in some similar hole—you would have been at this moment!" replied Gammon, totally losing sight of the very different account of the matter which he had given five minutes before, but speaking with a sudden sternness that quite overawed Titmouse. Here it was a case of *Liar* v *Fool;* and the latter did not perceive the slip made by his adversary—who, however, immediately became aware of his little inconsistency, and colored with annoyance.

"You'll excuse me, sir," quoth Titmouse presently, and with an air which was becoming momentarily more timid and doubtful—"but *will* you, if all this isn't a bottle of smoke, tell me how you can *prove* it all? Because, you know, it isn't only *saying* the thing that will do—you know, Mr. Gammon?"

"Certainly—certainly! You are quite right, Mr. Titmouse! Nothing can be more reasonable! Your curiosity shall be gratified. Aware that your natural acuteness, my dear sir, would in all probability prompt you to make the very observation you have now made, I have provided myself with the two principal documents, and you shall see them."

With this he produced his pocket-book, and took out carefully two small pieces of paper, folded up. These, after a very brief preliminary explanation which made Titmouse tremble from head to foot, and no longer disbelieve the representations of Gammon, he unfolded and read—Titmouse looking affrightedly over his shoulder.

"Do I know the handwriting?" he inquired faintly.

"Probably not," replied Gammon.

"It's devilish queer sort of writing, and precious little of it——"

"It *is*, and when you consider——"

"Are both in the same handwriting?" inquired Titmouse, taking them into his tremulous hand; while Gammon observed that his countenance indicated the despair which had taken possession of him.

"That cursed curtain is *so* much in the light," said Titmouse, looking up; and going toward it, as if to draw it aside, he started suddenly away from Gammon, and with frenzied gestures tore the little papers to pieces with inconceivable rapidity, and flung them out of the window, where a brisk breeze instantly took them up and scattered them

abroad—the glistening fragments—never to be again reunited. Having performed this astounding feat, he instantly turned round, and leaning his back against the window, gazed at Gammon with a desperate air of mingled apprehension and triumph, but spoke not a word. Nor did Gammon; but—oh the look with which he regarded Titmouse as he slowly approached toward him, who, stepping aside as Gammon advanced, reached the cabinet, and with desperate rapidity threw open the door, and, as if the devil had been waiting his bidding, in a moment turned round upon Gammon with a pistol.

"So help me God, I'll fire!" gasped Titmouse, cocking and presenting it. "I will—I WILL—*One!—Two!*—For God's sake! be off!—It's loaded, and no mistake!—If I say *Th*—I'll fire, if I'm hanged for it!"

"Booby! You may put your pistol down, sir!" said Gammon calmly and resolutely, a contemptuous smile passing over his pale features.

"Demme!—distance!—Keep your distance!" cried Titmouse, his voice quivering with agitation.

"Ridiculous simpleton!—You poor rogue!" said Gammon, laughingly. There was, however, *murder* in his smile; and Titmouse instinctively perceived it. He kept his deadly weapon pointed full at Gammon's breast, but his hand trembled violently.

Gammon stood for a minute, gazing steadfastly, and without moving, at Titmouse; then shrugging his shoulders, with a bitter smile returned to his chair and resumed his seat. Titmouse, however, refused to follow his example.

"So help me God, sir! I will not hurt a hair of your head," said Gammon earnestly. Still Titmouse remained at the window, pistol in hand. "Why should I hurt you? What have you to fear, you little idiot!" inquired Gammon impatiently. "Do you, then, really think you have injured me? Do you positively think me so great a fool, my little friend, as readily to have trusted you with the precious originals of which those were only the copies!—Copies which I can replace in a minute or two's time! The originals, believe me, are far away, and safe enough under lock and key!"

"I—I—I don't believe you," gasped Titmouse, dropping the hand that held the pistol, and speaking in a truly dismal tone.

"So help me God – I'll fire!"

"That does not signify, my worthy little friend," said Gammon, with an infernal smile, "if the *fact* be so. That you are a fool, you must by this time even yourself begin to suspect; and you *can't* doubt that you are an arrant little rogue after what has just taken place? Eh? 'Twas a bright idea truly—well conceived and boldly executed. I give you all the credit for it; and it is only your misfortune that it was not successful. So let us now return to business. Uncock your pistol, replace it in your cabinet, and resume your seat, or in a minute's time I leave you, and go direct to Lord Dreddlington; and if so, you had better use that pistol in blowing out you *own* brains—if you have any."

Titmouse, after a moment or two's pause of irresolution, passively obeyed—very nearly on the point of crying aloud with disappointment and impotent rage; and he and Gammon were presently again sitting opposite to one another.

Gammon was cold and collected—yet must it not have cost him a prodigious effort? Tho he had told Titmouse that they were *copies* only which he had destroyed, they were, nevertheless, the ORIGINALS, which with such an incredible indiscretion he had trusted into the hands of Titmouse; they were the ORIGINALS which Titmouse had just scattered to the winds.

"Are you *now* satisfied, Mr. Titmouse, that you are completely at my mercy, and at the same time totally undeserving of it?" said Gammon, speaking in a low and earnest tone, and with much of his former kindness of manner. Soothing and gentle as was his voice, he felt as if he could instantly have destroyed the audacious little miscreant before him. "Do not, my dear Titmouse, madly make me your enemy, but rather your friend—your watchful and powerful friend whose every interest is identified with your own. Remember all that I have done and sacrificed for you. During these last two years have I not ruinously neglected my own interest to look after yours?"

Gammon paused, and abruptly added: "I have but to lift my finger, and this splendid dressing gown of yours, Titmouse, is exchanged for a prison-jacket——"

"O Lord! O Lord! O Lord!!" suddenly exclaimed Titmouse with a shudder, "I wish I were dead and forgotten! O Lord! what shall I do? 'Pon my *soul*," he struck his forehead with some violence, "I'm going mad——"

"Consider, Mr. Titmouse, calmly, how reasonable is my offer," proceeded Gammon.

"Here's Lady Cicely to have £3,000 a year," passionately interposed Titmouse.

"Not till after your death, my dear sir——"

"Then she shall have it directly; for curse me if I don't kill myself——"

"Then she would never have a farthing—for I should instantly produce the real heir——"

"Yah!" exclaimed Titmouse, uttering a sound like the sharp, furious bark of a cur foiled at all points. He threw himself on the sofa, and folded his arms on his breast, compressing them, as it were, with convulsive vehemence.

"Do not excite yourself, Mr. Titmouse—you are still one of the most fortunate men upon earth, to have fallen into hands like mine, I can assure you! You will still enjoy a truly splendid income—a little short of nine thousand a year—for I will undertake to raise the Yatton rental, within a year or two, to twelve or thirteen thousand a year, as I have often told you—I have explained to you over and over again, how absurdly under their value they were let in the time of——"

"And you've perhaps forgotten that I've borrowed nearly fifty thousand pounds—that costs nothing, I suppose!"

"Well, certainly, you must be a little careful for a year or two, that's all——"

"Demme, sir!—I must give up my *yacht!*" exclaimed Titmouse, desperately snapping his thumb and finger vehemently at Gammon.

"Yes—or Yatton," replied Gammon sternly. "After all—what more shall I be than a sort of steward of yours?"

"I don't want one," interrupted Titmouse; and starting from the sofa, walked to the window, where he stood with his back turned toward Gammon, and crying! Gammon eyed him for several minutes in silence, and then slowly approaching him, tapped him briskly on the shoulder. Titmouse started. "Come, sir—you have now, I hope, relieved your little feelings, and must attend to me—and be prompt, too, sir!—The time for trifling, and playing the baby or the girl, is gone. Hark you, sir!—yield me my terms, or this very day I spring a mine under your feet, you little villain! that shall blow you into ten thousand atoms, and scatter

them wider than ever you scattered just now those bits of worthless paper! Do you hear that?"

"Pause," continued Gammon, in a low vehement tone, and manner, "and you are lost—stripped of this gaudy dress—turned out of this splendid house into the streets, or a prison!—If I quit this room—and I will not wait much longer—without your plain and written consent to my terms, I shall go direct to my Lord Dreddlington, and tell him the obscure and base-born impostor that has crept——"

"O Mr. Gammon—Mr. Gammon! have mercy on me!" exclaimed Titmouse, shaking like an aspen-leaf—at length realizing the terrible extent of danger impending over him.

"Have mercy on yourself!" rejoined Gammon sternly.

"I will!—I'll do all you ask—I will, so help me——"

"I'm glad to hear it!" said Gammon, relaxing his hold of Titmouse; and, in a voice of returning kindness, he added: "O Titmouse! Titmouse! how fearful would be the scene—when your noble father-in-law—alas! you must have quitted the country! His lordship would have instantly divorced you from the Lady Cecilia!"

"You can't think how I love Lady Cicely!" exclaimed Titmouse in a broken voice.

"Aye—but would she love *you*, if she knew who and what you were?"

"O Lord! O Lord! I love Lady Cicely! I love Lady Cicely!" he bawled.

"Then get pen, ink, and paper if you would not lose her forever!"

"Here they are, Mr. Gammon!" exclaimed Titmouse, hastily stepping to his desk, which lay on a table; and with tremulous eagerness he got out a quire of writing paper and took a pen. "Suppose *you* write, Mr. Gammon," said he suddenly, "my hand trembles so! Lord, I feel so sick. I'll sign anything you like!"

"Perhaps it would be better," replied Gammon, sitting down and dipping his pen into the inkstand; "it may save time." He commenced writing, and, as he went on, said at intervals: "Yes, Titmouse! Thank God, all is now over! It shall no longer be in Lord Dreddlington's power—no, nor any one's—to beggar you—transport you—to take your noble wife from you——"

"Oh, no, no! You know Lady Cicely's taken me for better for worse, for richer for poorer!" interrupted Titmouse, in a sort of agony of apprehension.

"Ah, Titmouse! But she did not know, when she said that, that she was speaking to a——"

"What! wouldn't it have held good?" exclaimed Titmouse, perfectly aghast.

"We need not speculate on a case that cannot arise, my dear Titmouse," replied Gammon, eying him steadfastly,

and then resuming his writing. "This paper becomes, as they say at sea, your sheet-anchor! Here you shall remain —the owner of Yatton—of this splendid house—husband of Lady Cecilia—a member of Parliament—and in due time, as 'my Lord Drelincourt,' you shall take your place permanently in the Upper House of Parliament, amongst the hereditary legislators of your country. Now, Mr. Titmouse, sign your name and there's an end forever of all your unhappiness!"

Titmouse eagerly took the pen, and, with a very trembling hand, affixed his signature to what Gammon had written.

"You'll sign it too, eh?" he inquired timidly.

"Certainly, my dear Titmouse." Gammon affixed his signature, after a moment's consideration. "Now we are both bound—we are friends for life! Let us shake hands, my dear, dear Titmouse, to bind the bargain!"

They did so, Gammon cordially taking into his hands each hand of Titmouse, who, in his anxiety and excitement, never once thought of asking Mr. Gammon to allow him to read over what he had signed.

"O Lord!" he exclaimed, heaving a very deep sigh, "it seems as if we'd been only in a dream! I begin to feel *something like again!*—It's really all right?"

"On my sacred word of honor," replied Gammon, laying his hand on his heart, "provided you perform the engagement into which you have this day entered."

"Never fear! honor bright!" said Titmouse, placing *his* on his heart, with as solemn a look as he could assume.

Mr. Gammon, having folded up his paper, put in into his pocket-book.

"I was a trifle too deep for you, Titmouse, eh?" said he, good-humoredly. "How could you suppose me green enough to bring you the *real* documents?" he added, with perfect command of voice and feature.

"Where are they?" inquired Titmouse timidly.

"At a banker's, in a double-iron strong-box, with three different locks."

"Lord!—But, *in course*, you'll put them into the fire when I've performed my agreement, eh?"

Gammon looked at him for a moment, doubtful what answer to make to this unexpected question.

"My dear Titmouse," said he at length, "I will be candid—I must preserve them—but no human eye shall ever see them except my own."

"My stars!—Excuse me——" stammered Titmouse uneasily.

"Never fear *my* honor, Titmouse! Have you ever had reason to do so?"

"No—never! It's quite true! And why don't you trust *me*?"

"Have you forgotten!—*Did* I not trust you—*as you supposed*"—quickly subjoined Gammon, positively on the point of again committing himself; "and when you fancied you really had in your power the precious documents?"

"Oh! well," said Titmouse, his face flushing all over, "but that's all past and gone."

"You *must* rely on my honor—and I'll tell you why. What would be easier than for me to pretend to you that the papers which you might see me burn, were really the originals and yet be no such thing?"

"In course—yes; I see!" replied Titmouse—who, however, had really not comprehended the case which Gammon had put to him. "Well—but—I say—excuse me, Mr. Gammon," said Titmouse, hesitatingly returning, as Gammon imagined, to the charge, "but—you said something about the *real* heir."

"Certainly. There *is* such a person, I assure you!"

"Well—but since you and I have made it up and are friends for life—eh?—what's to be done with the fellow?"

"That is at present no concern—nay, it never will be any concern of yours or mine. Surely it is enough for you that you are enjoying the rank and fortune belonging to some one else? Good gracious! I can't help reminding you—fancy the natural son of a cobbler—figuring away as the Right Honorable Lord Drelincourt—while all the while the real Lord Drelincourt is—nay, at this moment, pining, poor soul! in poverty and obscurity."

"Well—I dare say he's used to it, so it can't hurt him much! But I've been thinking, Mr. Gammon, couldn't we get him—pressed? or enlisted into the army?—He's a deuced deal better out of the way, you know, for both of us!"

"Sir!" interrupted Gammon, speaking very seriously, and even with a melancholy and apprehensive air, "leave the future to *me*. I have made all requisite arrangements, and am myself implicated already to a most awful extent on your behalf; the only person on earth beside myself that can disturb my arrangements is yourself. Will you execute the necessary documents as soon as they are ready? I will cause them to be prepared immediately."

"Oh! yes," and he added in a lower tone, "take care, Mr. Gammon, that no one knows *why!*—eh, you know?"

"Leave that to *me!*—Good morning, Mr. Titmouse."

What could Gammon have been thinking about when he trusted the originals into the hands of Titmouse? At the mere recollection of which, as he walked along, he ground his teeth together with the vehemence of his emotions. All

he had henceforth to trust to was his mastery over the fears of a fool.

The object which Gammon had originally proposed to himself, and unwaveringly fixed his eye upon amidst all the mazy tortuosities of his course, since taking up the cause of Tittlebat Titmouse, was his own permanent establishment in the upper sphere of society; conscious that could he but once emerge into political life his energies would insure him speedy distinction. With an independent income of £2,000 a year, he felt that he should be standing on sure ground. But even above and beyond this, there was one dazzling object of his hopes and wishes, which, unattained, would, on several accounts, render all others comparatively valueless—a union with Miss Aubrey. His heart fluttered within him at the bare notion of such an event. Absorbed with these reflections he started on being accosted by the footman of the Earl of Dreddlington, who had ordered his carriage to draw up, to enable his lordship to speak to him. It was the end of Oxford Street nearest to the City.

"Sir—Mr. Gammon—good-day, sir!" commenced the Earl, with a slight appearance of displeasure; "pray, has anything unfortunate happened——"

"Unfortunate! I beg your lordship's pardon——" interrupted Gammon, gazing with surprise at the Earl.

"You do not *generally* forget your appointments. The Marquis, I, and the gentlemen of the direction have been waiting for you at the office for a whole hour."

"Good Heavens! my lord—I am confounded!" said Gammon, suddenly recollecting the engagement; "I forgot everything in a sudden fit of indisposition at the house of a client at Bayswater. I can but apologize, my lord——"

"Sir, say no more; your looks are more than sufficient; and I beg that you will do me the honor to accept a seat in my carriage, and tell me whither you will be driven."

Since his lordship was as peremptory as politeness would permit him to be, in got Gammon, and named THE GUNPOWDER AND FRESHWATER COMPANY'S OFFICES, in Lothbury, in the hopes of finding yet some of the gentlemen whom he had so sadly disappointed.

"Sir," said the Earl, after much inquiry into the nature of Gammon's recent indisposition, "by the way, will you dine

with me to-morrow? We shall be quite alone, and I am anxious to obtain an accurate account of the present state of Mr. Titmouse's property; for to tell you the truth, I have heard of one or two little matters that occasion me some uneasiness——"

"Can anything be more unfortunate, my lord? I am engaged out to dinner for the next three days—if, indeed, I shall be well enough to go to any of them," said Gammon, with an agitation which could have escaped the observation of few persons except the Earl of Dreddlington.

"Sir—I exceedingly regret to hear it: let me trust that some day next week I shall be more fortunate. There are several matters on which I am desirous of consulting you. When did you last see Mr. Titmouse?"

"Let me see, my lord—I—don't think I've seen him since Monday last, when I casually met him in one of the committee-rooms of the House of Commons, where, by the way, he seems a pretty frequent attendant——"

"I'm glad to hear it," replied the Earl, somewhat gravely, with a slight expression of surprise. Gammon, therefore, fancied that the Earl had received recent intelligence of some of the wild pranks of his hopeful son-in-law.

"Will you, sir—by the way—have the goodness to write off to-day to General Epaulett's solicitors, and tell them I wish to pay off immediately £12,000 of his mortgage?"

While the Earl was speaking, the carriage drew up at the door of the company's office and Gammon alighted. The Earl, however, finding that all the gentlemen whom he had left there had quitted, drove off westward, at a smart pace, and reached the House in time for the matters which he had mentioned to Mr. Gammon. That gentleman soon dropped the languid demeanor he had worn in Lord Dreddlington's presence, and addressed himself with energy and decision to a great number of important and difficult matters requiring his attention—principally connected with several of the public companies in which he was interested—and one of which, in particular, required the greatest possible care and tact, in order to prevent its bursting—prematurely.

Gammon had, by his skilful but not very scrupulous maneuvering, already put into Lord Dreddlington's pocket some forty thousand pounds, and at the same time involved his

lordship in liabilities which he never dreamed of, and even Gammon himself had not contemplated. Then he warmed with his apparent proximity to Parliament (to that part of Titmouse's bargain Gammon resolved to hold him to the very letter) which he was sure of entering on the very next election. By that time he would have realized a sum, through his connection with the various companies, which, even disregarding the income to be derived thereafter from the Yatton property, would render him so far independent as to warrant him in dissolving partnership with Messrs. Quirk and Snap, and quitting at least the *practice* of the profession.

Mr. Gammon was a man of very powerful mind, possessing energies of the highest order. His ambition was boundless and he felt within himself a capacity for the management of political affairs of no ordinary magnitude, could he but force himself into the regions where his energies and qualifications could be discovered and appreciated. Indeed, I will undertake to say that, had Gammon only been a *good* man, he would, in all probability, have become a great one. There was one end upon which all his thoughts settled with a sort of agitating interest—his connection with the Aubreys; and whenever that name occurred to his thoughts, one beauteous image rose before him like that of an angel—I mean Miss Aubrey. She was the first object that had ever excited in him any, the faintest, semblance of the passion of *love*—that love, I mean, which is in a manner purified and sublimated from all grossness or sensuality by due appreciation of intellectual and moral excellence. When he dwelt upon the character of Miss Aubrey, and for a moment realized the possibility of a union with her, he felt, as it were, elevated above himself.

His passion for her had risen to a most extraordinary pitch of intensity, and become a sort of infatuation. In spite of all that had happened at Yatton, he had contrived to continue on terms of considerable intimacy with the Aubreys; and had, moreover, been all the while so watchful over himself as to have given none of them any reason to suspect the state of his feelings toward Miss Aubrey. But he felt that something must at length be *done*, or attempted, to carry into effect his fond wishes with reference to her, and, moreover, that his circumstances *required* an immediate move.

CHAPTER XXVI

TELLS HOW MR. GAMMON AT LAST MUSTERS COURAGE TO APPROACH MISS AUBREY, AND WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF HER ACTION TO ALL CONCERNED

Two days afterward, approaching the house of the Aubreys shortly after eleven o'clock, he beheld Mrs. Aubrey, accompanied by the two children, quit the house, and turn toward the Park. Gammon's heart began to beat hard. Though he never cared much for dress, his appearance on the present occasion afforded indications of some little *attention* to it; and he appeared simply a well-dressed gentleman, in a dark-blue buttoned surtout, with velvet collar, and plain black stock. After a moment's somewhat flurried pause, he knocked and rang at Mr. Aubrey's door.

"Is Mr. Aubrey within?" he inquired of the very pretty and respectable-looking maidservant, who presently answered his summons.

"No, sir; he is never here after——"

"Perhaps *Mrs.* Aubrey——"

"No, sir; there is only Miss Aubrey at home."

"Perhaps—I could see Miss Aubrey for a moment?" inquired Gammon, with as matter-of-fact an air as he could assume.

"Certainly, sir—she is in the drawing-room. Will you walk up-stairs?" said the girl, who of course knew him well, as not an infrequent visitor at the house. So she led the way up-stairs, he following, and with somewhat fading color.

Miss Aubrey was sitting writing at her desk. There was a little air of negligence in the arrangement of her hair, and her light morning costume displayed her figure to infinite advantage. There was really something inexpressibly lovely in her whole appearance, seen tho she was at that moment by Gammon through a faint mist of displeasure which she had thrown around herself.

"Good morning, Mr. Gammon," she commenced, turning toward him, gazing at him with some curiosity.

"May I venture to hope, madam, that I am not intruding upon you?" said he, seating himself in the nearest chair.

"My brother always leaves at half-past nine; is he not at the Temple to-day, Mr. Gammon?" she asked.

"I really don't know—in fact, I have not been there to-day; I thought it better, perhaps——" He paused for a second.

"I sincerely trust, Mr. Gammon," interrupted Miss Aubrey, with great anxiety, "that nothing unpleasant—unfortunate—has happened. For Heaven's sake tell me!"

"I assure you, madam, upon my honor, that nothing whatever has happened, that I know of, since last we met."

"Oh, dear—I was getting so alarmed!" said she, with a faint sigh.

"Certainly, madam, you have no occasion to be alarmed; I have, however, an errand—one to *me*, at least, of inexpressible importance," he commenced, and in a lower key than that in which he had previously spoken; and there was a peculiarity in his manner which quite rivetted Miss Aubrey's eye upon his expressive—and now, she saw plainly, agitated countenance.

"I hope, madam, that comparatively few as have been my opportunities of becoming acquainted with it, I may venture to express my profound appreciation of your superior character."

"Really, sir," interrupted Miss Aubrey "you are not candid with me. I am now certain that you have some unpleasant communication to make! Do, I entreat of you, Mr. Gammon, give me credit for a *little* presence of mind and firmness; let me know the worst, and be prepared to break it to my brother and sister." Gammon seemed unable to bear her bright blue eyes fixed upon his own, which he directed to the floor, while his cheek flushed. Then he looked again at her; and with an eye that explained all, and drove away the bloom from Miss Aubrey's cheek, while it also suspended, for a moment, her breathing, he said:

"Oh, forgive me for an instant—for one moment bear with me, Miss Aubrey! This interview agitates me almost to death; it is that which for a thousand hours of intense—absorbing—agonizing doubts and fears I have been looking forward to!" Miss Aubrey sat perfectly silent and motionless, gazing intently at him, with blanched cheek: he might have been

addressing a Grecian statue. "And now—now that it has at last arrived—when I feel as if I were breathing a new—a maddening atmosphere, occasioned by your presence—by the sight of your surpassing loveliness——"

"Gracious mercy, sir! what can you mean!" at length interrupted Miss Aubrey, with a slight start—at the same time slipping her chair a little further from Mr. Gammon. "I declare, sir, I do not in the least understand you," she continued, with much energy; but her increasing paleness showed the effect which his extraordinary conduct had produced upon her.

"I perceive, madam, that you are agitated——"

"I am, sir! astonished!—shocked!—I could not have imagined——"

"Madam! madam! at the risk of being deemed unkind—cruel—if I *die* for it, I cannot resist telling you that I reverence—I love you to a degree——"

"O Heavens!" murmured Miss Aubrey, still gazing with an air of amazement at him. Several times she thought of rising to ring the bell and at once get rid of so astounding an interruption and intrusion; but for several reasons she abstained from doing so as long as possible.

"It would be ridiculous, sir," said she, at length, with dignity, "to affect ignorance of your meaning and intentions; but may I venture to ask what conduct of mine—what single act of mine—or word—or look—has ever induced you to imagine—for one moment to indulge so insane——"

"Alas, madam! that which you could not conceal or control—your incomparable excellence—your beauty—loveliness. Madam! madam! the mere sight of your transcendent charms—my soul sank prostrate before you the first moment that I ever saw you——"

All this was uttered by Gammon in a very low tone, and with passionate fervor of manner. Miss Aubrey trembled visibly and had grown very cold.

"I certainly ought to feel flattered, sir," said she, rapidly recovering herself, "by the high terms in which you are pleased to speak of me—of one who has not the slightest claim upon your good opinion. I really cannot conceive what conduct of mine can have led you to imagine that such an—an—*application*—as this could be successful—or received otherwise than with astonishment—and, if persisted in—*dis-*

pleasure, Mr. Gammon." This she said in her natural manner, and very pointedly.

"Miss Aubrey—permit me——"

"I cannot, sir—I have heard already too much; and I am sure that when a lady requests a *gentleman* to desist from conduct which pains and shocks her—sir," she added hastily and peremptorily, "I beg you will at once desist from addressing me in so very improper a strain and manner!"

"Indulge my agonized feelings for one moment, Miss Aubrey," said Gammon, with desperate energy; "alas! I had suspected—I had feared—that our respective positions in society would lead you to despise so comparatively humble and obscure a person in point of station and circumstances——"

"*Sir!*" exclaimed Kate magnificently, drawing up her figure to its utmost height, her manner almost petrifying Gammon, whose last words she had most unaccountably imagined, at the moment, to amount to a bitter sarcastic allusion to their fallen fortunes and diminished personal consequence in society; but she was quickly undeceived, as he proceeded fervently: "Yes, madam—your birth—your family connections—your transcendent mental and personal qualities shining all the brighter in the gloom of adversity——"

"I—I—I beg your pardon, sir—I misunderstood you," said Kate, discovering her error and coloring violently; "but it is even more painful to me to listen to the language you are addressing to me. Since you urge me to it, I beg you to understand, sir, that if by what you have been saying to me I am to gather that you are making me an offer of your addresses, I decline them at once, most peremptorily, as a thing quite out of the question." The tone and manner in which this was said blighted all the nascent hopes of Gammon, who looked the very image of misery and despair. The workings of his strongly marked features told of the agony of his feelings. Neither of them spoke for a few moments. "Alas! madam," at length he inquired, in a tremulous voice, "am I presumptuous if I intimate a fear—which I dare hardly own to myself even—that I am too late—that there *is some more fortunate*——" Miss Aubrey blushed scarlet.

"Sir," said she, with quick indignant energy, "I should certainly consider such inquiries—most—*presumptuous*—most offensive"—and indeed her eye quite shone with indignation.

Gammon gazed at her with piercing intensity, and spoke not. "You cannot but be aware, sir, that you are greatly taxing my forbearance—nay, sir, I feel that you are taking a very great liberty in making any such inquiries or suggestions," continued Miss Aubrey, more calmly; "but, as your manner is unobjectionable and respectful, I have no objection to say, sir, most unhesitatingly, that the reason you hint at is not in the least concerned in the answer I have given. I have declined your proposals, sir, simply because I *choose* to decline them—because I have not, nor ever could have the least disposition to entertain them."

Gammon could not, at the moment, determine whether she really had or had not a pre-engagement.

"Madam, you would bear with me did you but know the exquisite suffering your words occasion me! Your hopeless tone and manner appear to my soul to consign it to perdition—to render me perfectly careless about life," said Gammon, with irresistible pathos; and Miss Aubrey, as she looked and listened, in spite of herself, pitied him. "I might, perhaps, establish *some* claim to your favor, were I at liberty to recount to you my long unwearied exertions to shield your noble-spirited brother—nay, all of you—from impending trouble and danger—to avert it from you."

"We are indeed deeply sensible of your kindness toward us, Mr. Gammon."

"Suffer me, Miss Aubrey, but one word more," he continued eagerly, apprehensive that she was about to check him. "Were you but aware of the circumstances under which I come to throw myself at your feet—myself, and all I have—nor is that little, for I am in independent circumstances—I shall soon be in the House of Commons—" Miss Aubrey exhibited still more unequivocal symptoms of impatience—"and forever have abandoned the hateful walk in life to which for the last few years——"

"I suppose I *must* listen to you, sir, however painful to me, if, after all I have said, you choose to continue," said Miss Aubrey with calm displeasure.

But Gammon persevered. "I say, Miss Aubrey, that could you but catch a glimpse of the troubles which lurk around you all—infinitely greater than any which you have even yet experienced—which are every day coming nearer to you——"

"What *do* you mean, Mr. Gammon?"

"—And which I may be unable any longer to avert from you—you would at least appreciate the pure and disinterested motives with which I set out upon my truly disastrous mission."

"Once more, Mr. Gammon, I assure you that I feel—that we all of us feel—a lively gratitude toward you for the great services you have rendered us; but how *can* that possibly vary my resolution? Surely, Mr. Gammon, you will not require me to enter again upon a most unpleasant——" Gammon heaved a profound sigh. "With regard to your intimation of the danger which menaces us, I own that I am disturbed by what you have said."

"I have but one word more to say, madam," said Gammon in a low impassioned tone, evidently preparing to sink upon one knee, and to assume an imploring attitude; on which Miss Aubrey rose from her chair and, stepping back a pace or two, said, with great resolution: "If you do not instantly resume your seat, sir, I shall ring the bell; for you are beginning to take advantage of my present defenseless position —you are *persecuting* me, and I will not suffer it. Sir, resume your seat, or I summon the servant into the room—a humiliation I wish to spare you."

Her voice was not half so imperative as was her eye. He felt that his cause was hopeless; he bowed profoundly, and said in a low tone, "I obey you, madam."

Neither of them spoke for some moments. At length, "I am sure, sir," said Miss Aubrey, looking at her watch, "you will forgive me for reminding you that when you entered I was engaged writing letters," and she glanced at her desk; "for which purpose alone it is that I am not now accompanying my sister and the children."

"I feel too painfully, madam, that I am intruding; but I shall soon cease to trouble you. Every one has some great bitterness to pass through at some time or other in his life—and I have this instant passed through mine," replied Gammon gloomily. "I will not say that *the bitterness of death is past;* but I feel that life has henceforth, as far as I am concerned, nothing worth pursuing."

"It is high time that you should leave me, sir," presently said Miss Aubrey, determinedly. "I have suffered surely suffi-

"A humiliation
I wish to
spare you"

ciently already; and my first answer is also my last. I beg now, sir, that you will retire."

"Madam, you are obeyed," replied Gammon rising, and speaking in a tone of sorrowful deference. He felt that his fate was sealed. "I now seem fully aware, to myself even, of the unwarrantable liberty I have taken, and solicit your forgiveness." Miss Aubrey bowed to him loftily. "I will not presume to solicit your silence to Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey concerning the visit I have paid you?" he continued very anxiously.

"I am not in the habit, sir, of concealing *anything* from my brother and sister; but I shall freely exercise my own discretion in the matter."

"Well, madam," said he, preparing to move toward the door, while Miss Aubrey raised her hand to the bell, "in taking leave of you, receive my solemn assurance that, haughtily as you have repelled my advances this day, I will yet continue to do all that is in my power to avert the troubles now threatening your brother—which, I fear, however, will be but of little avail! Farewell, farewell, Miss Aubrey!" he exclaimed, and was the next moment rapidly descending the stairs. As he left, Miss Aubrey, bursting into tears, threw herself again upon the sofa, and continued long in a state of excessive agitation. Mr. Gammon walked eastward at a rapid pace, and in a state of mind which cannot be described.

The reader may imagine the alarm occasioned Mr. Aubrey on his return from the Temple in the evening of the day on which Gammon had paid his remarkable visit to Miss Aubrey, by the sight of the troubled countenances of his wife and sister. Mrs. Aubrey had returned home within half an hour after Gammon's leaving Vivian Street, and to her Miss Aubrey instantly communicated his extraordinary proposal. Blank amazement was succeeded by vivid indignation in Mr. Aubrey, as soon as he had heard of this attempt to take advantage of their circumstances; and for several hours he was excessively agitated. He told them, the next morning, that he had resolved to communicate that day, either personally or by letter, with Mr. Gammon; not only peremptorily forbidding any renewal of his proposals, but also requesting him to discontinue his visits in Vivian Street.

Old Mr. Quirk was the next morning over head and ears in business of all kinds—and sadly missed the clear-headed and energetic Gammon; so, about ten o'clock, fearing that that gentleman's indisposition must still continue, inasmuch as there were no symptoms of his coming to the office as usual, he set off to make a call upon Mr. Gammon—whose countenance, flushed and harassed, strongly corroborated what he said on the subject of his indisposition. Still, he said he could attend to any business which Mr. Quirk was prepared to mention.

Before he quitted Mr. Gammon, that gentleman quietly and easily led conversation toward the subject of the various outstanding debts due to the firm.

"Ah, drat it!" quoth the old gentleman, briskly, "the heaviest, you know, is that fellow Aubrey's account."

"I understand you, my dear sir," replied Gammon with a sigh, "I fear I must plead no longer for him—I have gone already further than my duty to the firm warranted."

"It's a heavy balance, Gammon—a very heavy balance, £1,446 odd, to be outstanding so long. He agreed to pay interest on 't—didn't he, eh?—But really something ought to be done in it: and—come, Gammon! You've had *your* turn; now tip him over to *me*."

"I should be very sorry to distress him, poor devil!"

"Distress him? Our bill must be paid. D—n him! why don't he pay his debts? We pay ours—he must pay his."

"Certainly. By the way," said Gammon, suddenly, "if you were to take bold and decided steps, his friends would undoubtedly come forward and relieve him."

"Ay! ay! What think you of three days? There's he living all the while in a d—d fine house at the West End, like a gentleman—looks down, I'll be sworn, on us poor attorneys already, beggar as he is, because he's coming to the bar. Now mind, Gammon, no nonsense! I won't stand your coming in again as you did before—if I write—honor between thieves! eh?"

"I pledge my honor to you, my dear sir, that I will interfere no more; the law must take its course."

"That's it!" said Mr. Quirk. "I'll tip him a tickler before he's a day older that shall wake him up—ah, ha!"

"You will do me one favor, Mr. Quirk, I am sure," said Mr.

Gammon, with that civil but peremptory manner of his, which invariably commanded Quirk's assent to his suggestions—"you will insert a disclaimer in the letter of its emanating from *me*—or being with my consent?"

"Oh, Lud, yes! yes! anything."

"Nay—rather *against my wish*, you know—eh? Just for appearance' sake—as I have always appeared so infernally civil to the man, till now."

"Against my wish —
just for appearance sake"

"Will you draw it up yourself? So as the *other* matter's all right—no flinching—you may stick in as much palaver, Gammon!—ah, ha!—as you like!" replied Quirk; who, as the proposal involved only a greater measure of discourtesy on *his* part, without any sacrifice of his *interest*, regarded it with perfect indifference. He took his leave of Gammon in better spirits than those which he had carried with him. It

having been thus determined that within a day or two's time Mr. Aubrey should be required to pay the whole balance, under penalty of an arrest—Gammon, on being left alone, meditated on the probable results of this first hostile move against Mr. Aubrey. "I wonder whether she's told him," thought he, with a slight palpitation—which was somewhat increased by a pretty sharp knock at his outer door. The next minute beheld him ushering into his room, with a surprising degree of self-possession, Mr. Aubrey, whose countenance showed embarrassment and agitation.

"I have called upon you, Mr. Gammon," commenced Aubrey, "in consequence of your interview with my sister—your most extraordinary proposal to her."

Mr. Gammon listened respectfully, with an air of earnest attention, evidently not intending to make any reply.

"It cannot surprise you, sir, that I should have been made acquainted with it immediately on my return home yesterday evening. Sir, she has told me all that passed between you."

"I cannot presume to find fault with anything Miss Aubrey may have thought proper to do; she *cannot* do wrong," replied Gammon, calmly. "If I have done anything calculated to inflict the slightest pain upon a lady for whom I have so profound a respect, I am distressed beyond measure."

"I perfectly appreciate, Mr. Gammon, the position in which we stand with regard to each other," said Mr. Aubrey, with forced calmness. "Tho I am fearfully changed in respect of fortune, I am not a whit changed—*we are none of us changed*," he continued proudly, "in respect of personal feeling and character. And let me, Mr. Gammon, inform you that both my sister and I have felt vivid dissatisfaction at your conduct of yesterday; and I have deemed it expedient to lose no time in informing you that your proposals are out of the question, and can never be entertained, under any circumstances, for one moment."

Had Aubrey been, at that moment in the position he had formerly occupied, instead of the mere pauper he really was, in the presence of one whom he knew to be able to cast him instantly into prison, he could not have spoken with more dignified determination and even *hauteur*.

"I am undoubtedly aware, sir, of the disparity between Miss Aubrey and myself in point of position," said he coldly.

"I have said nothing of the kind that I am aware of, nor would I, on any account, say anything offensive to you, Mr. Gammon; but it is my duty to speak explicitly and decisively. I therefore now beg you to understand that your overtures must not, in any shape, or at any time, be renewed; and this I must insist upon without assigning or suggesting any reason whatever."

Gammon listened attentively and silently.

"I presume, Mr. Gammon, that I cannot be misunderstood?"

"It would be difficult to misunderstand what you say, sir," replied Gammon; in whose dark bosom Mr. Aubrey's words had, as it were, stung and roused the serpent PRIDE. But Mr. Gammon's external manner was calm and subdued.

"It gives me pain to be forced to add, Mr. Gammon, that after what has taken place, we all of us feel—that—it will be better for you to discontinue your visits at my house. I am sure your own sense of delicacy will appreciate the necessity which exists for such a suggestion on my part?"

"I perfectly understand you, Mr. Aubrey," replied Gammon, in the same grave and guarded manner which he had preserved throughout their interview. "I shall offer no apology, sir, for conduct which I do not feel to require one. I conceive that I had a perfect right to make, with all due deference and respect, the offer which it appears has given you so much offense." Then he proceeded, with a little excitement of manner: "There *are* dangers menacing you, Mr. Aubrey, of the most serious description, which I may possibly be unable to avert from you! I regret to say that I can *answer* for others no longer. I have been most bitterly disappointed; but you shall ever find me a man of my word—of as high and rigid honor even as yourself"—he paused, and felt that he had made an impression on his silent auditor—"and I hereby pledge myself, in the presence of God, that so far as in *me* lies, there shall not a hair of any of your heads be touched."

"Well, sir," replied Mr. Aubrey, sighing deeply, "I can only place my trust in Providence—and I *do*. I have suffered much already; and if it be the will of Heaven that I should suffer more, I hope it will be proved that I have not suffered already—*in vain!*"

"Mr. Aubrey," said Gammon, gazing at him with a bright-

ening eye, "my very soul owns the sublime presence of VIRTUE in your person! It is exalting—it is ennobling—merely to be permitted to witness so heroic an example of constancy as you exhibit!" He paused, and for some moments there was silence. "You do not distrust me, Mr. Aubrey?" said Gammon at length, with a confident air.

"No, Mr. Gammon!" replied Mr. Aubrey, eying him steadfastly, "I am not aware that I ever had any reason for doing so."

Shortly afterward he took his departure; and as he bent his steps slowly, and with thoughtful air, toward the Temple, he saw one or two things, on his own part, during his interview with Gammon, to regret—his sternness and pride; but nothing on the part of Gammon that had not been admirable. Could Mr. Aubrey, however, but have seen the satanic smile which settled upon Mr. Gammon's features, as soon as, after cordially shaking his hand, he had calmly shut the door upon Mr. Aubrey, it might have occasioned some few misgivings as to that gentleman's sincerity. Mr. Gammon resumed his seat and meditated upon their recent interview. Long he considered the subject, in every point of view; and at length sketched off the following draft of a letter to be copied by Mr. Quirk:

"DEAR SIR: Owing to a most serious and unexpected pecuniary outlay which we are called upon to make, we feel ourselves compelled to avail ourselves of whatever resources lie within our reach. Having been disappointed in several quarters, we are obliged to remind you of the heavy balance we have against you of £1,446 14s. 6d. You must be aware of the length of time during which it has been standing, and trust you will forgive us if we at length apprise you that it is absolutely impossible for us to allow of any more delay. Unless, therefore, the whole of the above balance, or at least £1,000 of it, be paid within three days of the date hereof, we regret to inform you we have finally made up our minds to let the law take its usual course.

"In writing thus, Messrs. Quirk and Snap feel it only due to their partner, Mr. Gammon, to add that he is no party to this application. Messrs. Q. and S. have felt, however, that the interests of the firm have already suffered long enough,

through their deference to the personal wishes and feelings of *one* member, but for whom their heavy balance would have been called for long ago, and, no doubt, in due course discharged.

"We regret being unable to vary or depart from the determination above expressed; and most sincerely hope your resources are of that nature that we shall be spared the unpleasantness of letting the law take its usual course."

Exactly on the seventh day from that on which Mr. Gammon had made his ill-omened advances toward Miss Aubrey, did the above dreadful and heartless letter reach its destination.

What was to be done in this fearful emergency, none of them knew—except to consent to an immediate sale of all their plate, books, and furniture. Their affliction, indeed, knew no bounds. Even Mr. Aubrey, tho for a long time he bore up heroically, was at length overcome by the agonies of the dear beings whose ruin was involved in his own.

Had not Gammon been prompt in his vengeance? So thought they all.

Aubrey hurried off, the next morning, in consternation, to Messrs. Runnington. Mr. Runnington, with a heavy heart and a gloomy countenance, set off instantly, alone, to the office of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap. He saw Mr. Gammon, who told him, with a well-dissembled air of disgust, to go in to Mr. Quirk or Mr. Snap. He did so, and found them inexorable. Mr. Quirk doggedly told Mr. Runnington that he had been out of pocket long enough, and would not be fooled by one of his own partners any longer. Mr. Runnington quitted them, fairly at his wits' end; and, on his return, told Mr. Aubrey, whom he had left at his office, that he had done, and could do, "nothing with the vultures of Saffron Hill." He knew not, in fact, what suggestion to offer—what scheme to devise—to extricate Mr. Aubrey from his present dreadful dilemma. As for applying for pecuniary assistance from friends, Mr. Aubrey's soul revolted at the bare thought. Was not one alone of his generous friends at that moment under a liability on his behalf of more than ten thousand pounds? No: with gloomy composure he felt that, at last, *his hour was come.*

Kate, however, got desperate; and, unknown to her brother wrote off a long—a heartrending letter to good old Lady Stratton, whose goddaughter she was, telling her everything. She took it very early in the morning, herself, to the post-office, and awaited the issue with fearful solicitude.

I have hardly heart to recount the events which followed upon poor Kate's adventure; but they form a striking exemplification of the mysterious manner in which frequently Providence, for its own awful and wise purposes, sees fit to accumulate troubles and sorrows upon the virtuous.

Old Lady Stratton had been for some months in very feeble health, and the receipt of Kate's letter occasioned her infinite distress. It will be remembered that she had long before effected a policy of insurance upon her life for £15,000, always intending to bequeath it as a little portion to poor Kate. She had many months before given the necessary instructions to her solicitor, Mr. Parkinson, for making her will, so as to carry into effect her kind intentions toward Kate, bequeathing also legacies of £500 apiece to each of Mr. Aubrey's little children. At the time when Kate's letter arrived, her ladyship's will had not been executed, but still lay, merely in draft, at Mr. Parkinson's office.

Feeling greatly indisposed, however, shortly after she had received Miss Aubrey's letter, she sent off an express to Mr. Parkinson to attend with her will; and, a few minutes afterward her attendants found it necessary to send off another express for her physician, Dr. Goddart. Before drawing a check for the sum of £700 or £800, which she intended instantly to place at Mr. Aubrey's disposal, she awaited Mr. Parkinson's return, that he—who managed all her affairs—might inform her of the exact balance then at her banker's. He was absent from Grilston when the express arrived; but he was followed, and about seven o'clock that evening entered Lady Stratton's residence, carrying with him the draft of her will, ready prepared for execution. His chief clerk also accompanied him, lest, by any possibility, a *witness* should be wanting. The countenances of the domestics warned him that there was not one moment to be lost; and he hastened at once into Lady Stratton's bedchamber. A hasty whisper from Dr. Goddart apprised him of the very critical situation of Lady Stratton. Writing materials stood ready prepared in the

room against Mr. Parkinson's arrival. She recognized him on his passing the foot of the bed, and in a feeble voice whispered, "*My will!—my will!*"

But it was too late. Before the pen could be placed within her fingers, those fingers had become incapable of holding it —for Lady Stratton at that moment experienced the paralytic seizure which Dr. Goddart had been dreading for three or four hours before. She lingered till about nine o'clock the next morning, when, in the presence of Mr. Parkinson, who

had not quitted the room for one instant, death released the venerable sufferer. She had thus died *intestate;* and all her personal property became the property of her ladyship's next of kin. Had this even happened but two years before, that next of kin would have been—Mr. Aubrey; but now—will the reader have patience to read it?—that next of kin was—TITTLEBAT TITMOUSE!

Yes, Mr. Titmouse had now become entitled to all the goods, chattels, credits, and effects which were of the late Lady Stratton; and before she had been laid in Yatton

churchyard, Mr. Parkinson received a letter from Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, as the solicitors of Mr. Titmouse, giving him formal notice of the title of their client, and requesting Mr. Parkinson to lose no time in making an inventory of the effects of her ladyship. Mr. Gammon himself went down, and arrived the day after the funeral. Guess his excitement on discovering the windfall which came to his client, Mr. Titmouse, in the policy of £15,000, the existence of which they had, of course, never dreamed of!

But there was another discovery, which occasioned him not a little excitement, as his flushed cheek and suspended breath testified—alas! poor Aubrey's BOND for £2,000, *with interest at five per cent.!*—an instrument which poor Lady Stratton, having always intended to destroy, latterly imagined that she had actually done so. It had, however, got accidentally mingled with other papers, which had found their way in the ordinary course to Mr. Parkinson, and who was himself ignorant of its existence, since it lay folded in a letter addressed to Lady Stratton, till it turned up while he was sorting the papers, in obedience to the instructions of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap. He turned pale and red by turns, as he held the accursed document in his fingers; probably, thought he, no one on earth but himself knew of its existence; and—but his sense of duty prevailed. Of course the obligee of the bond, and, as such, entitled to the principal money secured by it, together with all arrears of interest which might be due upon it, was now Mr. TITTLEBAT TITMOUSE.

CHAPTER XXVII

WHEREIN THE AUBREYS FALL TO THE LOWEST DEPTHS OF THEIR MISFORTUNES, WHICH THEY YET BEAR WITH UNFALTERING FORTITUDE

"FLY! Fly!—for God's sake fly! Lose not one moment of the precious respite which, by incredible efforts, I have contrived to secure you—a respite of but a few hours—and wrung from heartlessness and rapacity. In justice, much injured man! to yourself—to all you hold dear upon earth—to the precious interests entrusted to your keeping and involved in your destruction—again I say, Fly! Quit the country, if it be but for never so short a time, till you or your friends shall have succeeded in arranging your disordered affairs. *I see the rack preparing for you!*—Will you stay to be tortured?—and in the presence of the incomparable beings who—but my feelings overpower me! Indeed, Mr. Aubrey, if you disregard this note, through weak fears as to its writer's sincerity, or a far weaker and a wild notion of Quixotic honor and heroism—remember, in the moment of being overwhelmed, *this note*—and then, do justice to its writer.—Your faithful, unhappy, *distrusted* friend, O. G.

"P.S.—For God's sake burn or otherwise destroy this note as soon as you shall have read it."

Such was the letter which found its way into Mr. Aubrey's hands, just as the time which had been fixed by Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, for payment of their bill, was expiring. It had found him in a state of the deepest depression—but yet vigorously striving to preserve at least an appearance of composure in the presence of his wife and sister.

As Mr. Aubrey was re-perusing the letter, he heard a knock at the street door—an ordinary single knock, such as was by no means unusual at that period of the morning; yet, he

scarce knew why—it disconcerted him. He kept, however, his eye upon the letter, while he heard the maid opening the door,

"You're my prisoner, Sir."

and there stood behind the terror-stricken girl a tall stout man in a drab great-coat, with a slouched hat, and a thick walking-stick in his hand—looking over her shoulder into the

parlor, whose dismayed occupants soon shared the panic of poor Fanny.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said he, civilly advancing into the room and removing his hat, "is your name Charles Aubrey?"

"It is, sir," said Mr. Aubrey.

"You're my prisoner, sir," said the man, stepping close up to the wretched Aubrey and touching him on the shoulder, at the same time holding out a thin slip of paper—the warrant by virtue of which he was then acting. The moment that he advanced toward Mr. Aubrey a dreadful shriek burst from Mrs. Aubrey and Kate, who sprang forward and threw their arms wildly round him.

"Will you let me look at your warrant?" said Mr. Aubrey. Glancing over it, he saw that he was arrested for fourteen hundred pounds and upward, at the suit of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap.

"You see, sir, it's only my duty to do this here," said the officer respectfully.

"For mercy's sake, Agnes! Kate! as you love me!—be calm! You afflict me beyond measure," said Mr. Aubrey, who, tho he had grown very pale, yet preserved under the circumstances a remarkable degree of self-possession.

"Oh, mercy! mercy! for God's sake have mercy on him! on us!" exclaimed Kate.

"Charles! My love!" murmured Mrs. Aubrey faintly, "they surely will not separate us? Oh! let us go together; I don't care where we go to, so long as I am with you."

"Do not ask it, my darling!" replied Mr. Aubrey tenderly, as he supported her in his arm. "I shall be exposed to but little inconvenience, I am certain; there can be no violence or insult offered me so long as I submit myself peaceably to the laws! And I shall soon, please God, be back!"

Thus Mr. Aubrey endeavored by all the means in his power to soothe and pacify his wretched companions.

"Can I speak a word with you alone before I go?" he presently inquired of the officer.

"In course, sir," replied Grab; and, promising to return within a minute or two's time, Mr. Aubrey quitted the room with Grab close at his heels; and presently they were both standing in his little study.

"Who gave you your instructions in this matter?"

"Mr. Snap—it was him that brought this warrant to me——"

"Are you sure? Was it not Mr. Gammon?"

"No, sir—Snap—Snap; that little cockatoo of a chap. Mr. Gammon called at my office half an hour afterward, to be sure——"

"I thought so," interrupted Mr. Aubrey quickly.

"Ay," continued Grab, phlegmatically, "*he'll* see you don't come to much harm in this matter——"

"What do you mean?"

"Lord! I could tell by his way. He called to say that, since they had resolved to go agin you, he hoped we'd show you every attention and deal easy by you. And I think he said it was a cruel business, and that, as for him, he washed his hands on't!" Mr. Aubrey seemed confounded.

"I don't somehow think him and his partners are on the best of terms together—but that's no business o' mine, you know, sir! And now, sir, excuse me, but we must be jogging."

"But, my friend, is there really no way by which I can delay accompanying you for a few hours——"

"Oh, can't, sir—*un*possible!"

"You can remain in possession here—I will be in your custody—I have a little plate, books, and furniture, which would surely stand sufficient security——"

"It's no use, sir; go you must—and that without much longer shilly-shallying. It's no use!"

Aubrey seemed for a moment overpowered by his emotions.

"I fear, myself, that there is no alternative," said he; "but it will almost break the hearts of those ladies—one of whom is my wife——" His voice faltered.

"Now, my own Agnes! my sweet Kate!" commenced Aubrey, in a low earnest tone, having returned to them and bolted the door to secure themselves from interruption during the few precious moments which remained to them by the unusual kindness of the officer, "I must, within a very few minutes, leave you! Remember—remember, loves! I am unfortunate, but I am not disgraced—I look on this as a dispensation of Providence—a wise and good Providence; let us all learn submission—resignation! Whether or not we

are really the victims of treachery and hypocrisy, I am unable at present to tell; but let us learn to bear this last crowning indignity with the fortitude of Christians!—relying on it, that God will overrule the most trying and disastrous events for our good!" While he was speaking Mrs. Aubrey suddenly quitted the room, and after a moment's absence returned, her pallid, agitated countenance overspread with a wild smile of delight, as she exclaimed breathlessly: "There, love! dearest Charles! He says there is no harm in the world in going with you in the coach—and, indeed, we may have rooms to ourselves!"

"My sweet Agnes——"

"I will—I *will* go with you, Charles! Nothing shall prevent me—even if I leave you at the door of the place you are going to!" It was in vain for Mr. Aubrey to protest—as he did, both earnestly and vehemently; her impassioned importunities were irresistible, and she rushed breathlessly upstairs to prepare her dress to accompany him on his brief but melancholy journey. Within a very few minutes she returned, just as the sound of the coach wheels approaching the door was heard.

After embracing his weeping sister and his frightened children, he supported Mrs. Aubrey, Grab closely following them, into the coach. As they went along, in answer to Aubrey's anxious inquiries concerning the nature of the scenes which awaited him, Mr. Grab told him that his—Grab's—lockup was in Chancery Lane, and would be found as comfortable a place as need be. He informed his prisoner, further, that he might have his choice—whether to occupy a private room, with a bedroom opening into it—or go into the public room, where would be also some dozen other debtors, and in which case, of course, Mrs. Aubrey must return home alone. Mr. Aubrey inquired what would be the expense of the private room, and was horrified on hearing—two guineas and a half a day, paid in advance! exclusive of board and attendance, which doubtless would be charged for on a commensurate scale. The prisoner and his wife gazed at each other in silence and felt sick at heart.

"The smallest room—at the very top of the house—would suffice for both a sitting-room and bedroom," said Aubrey, "and we do not care a straw for furniture——"

"The room I told you of, or the public room, is all I've to offer you," replied Grab, somewhat doggedly. Sick at heart his wretched companions continued silent for the remainder of the journey, till the coach drew up opposite the door of the house of which they had been speaking.

They descended, followed up the steps of the house closely by Grab. Their hearts failed them as they heard the sound of heavy jingling keys from within opening the door; and the next moment they stood within a short, narrow, and dark passage.

"This here's the public room," quoth Grab, opening a door on his left, through which they caught a glimpse of a number of men—some smoking; others sitting with their feet on the table reading the newspapers; others playing at cards; and almost all of them drinking, and either laughing, talking, or singing.

"Now, sir, does this *here* suit your fancy?" inquired Grab, rather sharply. Mr. Aubrey felt his wife leaning heavily on his arm. "Mercy! I shall faint! I feel choked!" she whispered.

"Show us instantly up-stairs, to your private room—cost what it may," said Mr. Aubrey hastily.

"It's only fair to tell you, sir, you pay in advance—and for the whole day, tho you should be out again in a quarter of an hour's time—it's the rule of the house."

"Show us up-stairs, sir, without delay," said Mr. Aubrey peremptorily.

"Jemmy—show 'em up!" exclaimed Grab briskly; on which Jem went forward, followed by Mr. Aubrey, almost entirely supporting Mrs. Aubrey—who appeared very faint—up the narrow and angular staircase. This led them into a tolerably well-furnished room; and Mrs. Aubrey, on entering it, sank exhausted on the sofa. Here, again, the two windows were strongly secured with iron bars, which gave a peculiarly miserable appearance to the room. The unhappy couple gazed around them for a moment in silence.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said Grab, entering the room, "but must trouble you for *two, twelve, six;* always pay in advance, as I told you a-coming."

Aubrey, involuntarily shuddering, took out his pocket-book—Mrs. Aubrey bursting into tears—and handed to Grab

the only money he had—a five-pound note, requesting change. Meanwhile he earnestly begged him to send off a message instantly, with his card, to Mr. Runnington.

"A couple of shillings for the man, sir," said Grab, and, having received it, he withdrew, leaving Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey to themselves for nearly an hour and a half; at the end of which period, their hearts leaped for joy to see Mr. Runnington enter the room, with a countenance full of concern and sympathy.

"Well, but you shall not be much longer in this hateful hole, at any rate," said he, after some half-hour's anxious conversation with them, and, ringing the bell, he directed the man to send Grab up-stairs, and to fetch pen, ink, and paper. In a few minutes Grab appeared. "You've no objection, I suppose, Grab, to discharge Mr. Aubrey on my undertaking?"

"In course not, sir," replied Grab readily; but he was a good deal disappointed at so abrupt a close to his exactions. Mr. Runnington sat down and began to write. "You had better send off to the office and see if there's anything else there," he added (meaning that Grab should search, as he was bound to do, for any other writs against Mr. Aubrey which might be lodged with the sheriff, before discharging his prisoner out of custody).

"You don't apprehend anything *there*, do you?" inquired Mr. Runnington, rather seriously, without taking his eye from the paper on which he was writing.

"Heaven only knows! But I *think* not," replied Aubrey.

The following was the undertaking given by Mr. Runnington, and which operated as an instant release of his oppressed and truly persecuted client:

"Aubrey *ats.* Quirk and others.

"We hereby undertake to procure the execution of a good and sufficient bail-bond herein, for the above-named defendant, in due time.

"RUNNINGTON & Co.
"Defendant's Attorneys.

With this document lying before them, and awaiting the messenger's return from the sheriff's office, Mr. Runnington and Mr. Aubrey conversed together anxiously on the subject

of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap's bill. Mr. Aubrey was sufficiently acquainted with the general course of practise to be aware that beyond requiring him to put in bail to the action, no effectual step could be taken against him for several months to come; so that he had an interval of at least four months in which "to turn himself about," and endeavor to discover some mode of extricating himself from his present serious dilemma. After reminding Mr. Aubrey that neither a peer of the realm, nor a member of Parliament, nor an attorney could become bail for him, Mr. Runnington requested the names of two or three confidential friends to whom he might apply to become security for Mr. Aubrey; and as he should be at any time able to exonerate them from liability by surrendering his person to his creditors, he felt no hesitation in applying to them to perform for him this act of kindness. "By the way," said Mr. Runnington, in the course of their conversation, and with apparent carelessness, "could I say a word or two to you on a little matter of business? And will Mrs. Aubrey excuse us for a moment?" turning toward her. She bowed and they withdrew for a moment into the adjoining bedroom.

"Put this into your pocket," said Mr. Ruddington, taking out the day's newspaper; "and when you have an opportunity, read the account of what took place yesterday in the Court of King's Bench. For Heaven's sake don't alarm Mrs. Aubrey or Miss Aubrey; but, if anything occurs to you, do not lose one moment in putting yourself into communication with us. If possible, I will call at Vivian Street this evening."

Shortly afterward Grab entered the room.

"All right, sir!" said he to Mr. Runnington, and added, turning to Mr. Aubrey, "you're no longer in my custody, sir; and I hope you won't be, in a hurry, again!"

"O Charles! thank God! Let us not stay another moment!" exclaimed Mrs. Aubrey, joyously starting up and putting on her bonnet. "Oh, let us get once more into the open street!—the sweet fresh air!—Kate will go wild with joy to see us again!—O dear Mr. Runnington! how can we sufficiently thank you?" she added, turning toward him enthusiastically. Within a few minutes' time they had quitted that dismal scene; they were again apparently free. On first stepping into the bright cheering sunlight and bustling

noisy street, it had a sort of freshness—of novelty—to them. It seemed to the Aubreys as if ten times the real interval had elapsed between their entering and quitting the scene of his incarceration. With what exhilarated spirits they hastened homeward! as if a millstone were no longer suspended from their necks. But Mr. Aubrey suddenly bethought himself of the newspaper given him by Mr. Runnington; and it cost him, indeed, a great effort to assume a cheerfulness so foreign to his feelings.

While, however, they are thus walking homeward, let me, in order to enable the reader to appreciate the paragraph to which Mr. Runnington had called Aubrey's attention, turn from the virtuous couple to trace the movements of that master-spirit of evil, Mr. Gammon. What had passed between him and Miss Aubrey and her brother had satisfied him that the time for calling into action all his forces had arrived; and the exact end he proposed to himself was to plunge Mr. Aubrey at once into apparently inextricable and hopeless difficulty—into total ruin—so as to force Miss Aubrey into entertaining his addresses, as the sole means of effecting her brother's liberation.

For this purpose, it would be necessary to make Mr. Aubrey a debtor to so large an amount as would preclude the interference of even the most liberally disposed of his friends. But the mask was not yet to be thrown off; Gammon resolved to appear the firm friend of Mr. Aubrey to the last; deprecating vehemently, and making a pretense of striving to avert from him, the very proceedings which he was all the while, with secret skill and vigor, urging on against him. He determined, therefore, to recall Titmouse's attention to the two promissory notes for £5,000 each; to pretend reluctance to allow them to be put in suit, and yet to give him clearly to understand that *he* might do so, without giving mortal offense to Gammon.

He had just arrived at this decision, when a sharp knock at his door announced the arrival of Mr. Titmouse himself. Poor Titmouse had conceived, since his memorable interview with Gammon, a violent hatred of that gentleman, but this was almost absorbed in his dread of one who had such unlimited power over him. The sudden and serious diminution of his income by Gammon's rent-charge almost turned his

head upside down, and occasioned a pother in his little bosom, which was all the greater for his being unable to admit any sympathizing friend into his confidence. He had become fidgety and irritable to a degree; his countenance and demeanor were troubled and depressed: from all of which the more intimate among his brother senators naturally inferred that he had lost large sums at play, or was harassed by his election expenses, or had quarreled with his mistress, or been found out by his wife; or been kicked, and dared not call out the aggressor, or that some other such accident had befallen him as frequently happens to young gentlemen of fashion.

Now, Titmouse certainly *was* getting into rather deep water. Formidable creditors were beginning to look somewhat sternly after him from various quarters; his upholsterer was becoming troublesome; his wine-merchant insisted on at least four hundred pounds on account; Messrs. Jewel and Nicknack were surprised at having received no payment for sundry expensive articles of jewelry and *virtu*. His coachmaker, his tailor, a host of household creditors, were getting very restless: he had a running account of some £600 or £800 at the *Gliddington;* his yacht was a dreadful drain upon him; he had been unfortunate in his sporting speculations; in short, if Gammon had his anxieties, so had Titmouse his.

He felt himself getting terribly out at elbows; so much so, that he could no longer give that calm and undivided attention to his parliamentary duties which his enlightened constituents had a right to expect at his hands: and, in short, the sole occasion of his calling on Gammon was to see if that gentleman could devise some mode of once more replenishing his empty coffers—a further mortgage on the Yatton property being the exact mode of doing so which he was about to propose to Gammon. He felt, however, that it required some tact to broach that subject, in the present position of affairs; so he avowed that he had called to see if *Mr. Gammon's deeds were ready for signing*—as he, Titmouse, was anxious to get it off his mind. Time was very precious with Mr. Gammon: he therefore lost not a moment in plucking aside the thin disguise of Titmouse and discovering the real object of his visit. Mr. Gammon looked very serious, indeed, on hearing the account of Titmouse's prodigal expenditure, and remonstrated with him earnestly and even authoritatively;

but it instantly occurred to him—could there possibly be a better opportunity for broaching the subject of the two promissory notes?

"My dear Titmouse," said he, with great kindness of manner, "notwithstanding all I have felt it my duty to say, I do sincerely wish it were in my power to serve you in this emergency. But we really must spare old Yatton for a little—you've sadly burdened her already;—we shall be killing the goose to get at the golden egg, if we don't mind what we're about!"

"——! But what the devil's to be *done*, Mr. Gammon? For, 'pon my soul, I'm most *particular* hard up, and something must be done."

"We must bethink ourselves of our other resources, my dear sir—let us see." He paused, with his hand resting on his forehead for a few moments. "Oh! by the way—certainly," he added suddenly; "but no! it's a thousand pities; but my word is pledged."

"Eh? what? Does anything strike you, Gammon? 'Pon me life, what is it?" inquired Titmouse, pricking up his ears.

"Why, yes, certainly," replied Gammon musingly; adding, as if he did not intend Titmouse to hear him, "to be sure it would put ten thousand—nay, with the interest, nearly eleven——"

"The devil it would! *What* would? My stars, Mr. Gammon!" exclaimed Titmouse eagerly, "do let us know what it is!"

"Why, I was certainly thinking, at the moment," replied Gammon with a sigh, "of that poor devil Aubrey's two notes for £5,000 apiece and interest."

Titmouse's face suddenly fell. "O Lord! Is that all? Hang the fellow—he's a beggar—squeezed dry—nothing more to be got out of him!" he exclaimed, with mingled chagrin and contempt. "A'n't worth powder and shot! Blood from a stone—won't have anything worth taking this ten years to come!"

"Poor fellow!" quoth Gammon.

"'Pon my soul, Gammon, it's *me* you may say that of, I rather think!"

"Why," said Gammon, glancing rather keenly at Titmouse, "my first and greatest duty on earth, my dear Titmouse, is

to *you*—to look after, to secure your interests; and candor compels me to say that, whatever may be my feelings toward that unfortunate person, still I think you've only to squeeze *him* pretty hard, and blood would come from *other* people. Eh! you understand?"

"By Jove!—Indeed!—No! But would it really? How?—Squeeze away, then, and be ——! Do you bring an action against the fellow the first thing in the morning! Put him in jail and he'll get the money, I'll warrant him! Dem the fellow! why don't he pay his debts! It's devilish hard on *me*, a'n't it? Didn't I forgive him forty thousand pounds? By the way, I'd forgot there is the other ten thousand that Lord De la Zouch is surety for—when do we touch that?"

"Oh! we've taken a bond for *that*, which will not fall due before—let me see—the 24th of next January."

"'Pon my soul, what a cursed bore! But can't one do anything with it before then?"

"What! Sue on it before it's due?"

"No—egad! I mean, raise the wind on it. Surely Lord De la Zouch's name is——"

"Whew!" thought Gammon, "that stroke certainly had never occurred to me!—Aye, he's right, the little fool! Old Fang will advance £8,000 or £9,000 or more, even—I'll see to it, by Jove!" Then he said aloud: "It may be possible, certainly, my dear Titmouse; but I see very great obstacles in the way."

"Some cussed law point—eh?"

"Yes—but I assure you I will turn my best attention to it," he added, and proceeded to bring back Titmouse to the point at which he had started off. "And speaking of poor Aubrey—it's certainly true that you have been, I may say, extravagantly liberal to him—forbearing beyond example; and I can't think that any one can be expected, when he knows a wave of his hand will put some eleven thousand pounds into his pocket, to stand by idle forever! It is not in human nature——"

"Demme! I should think not!" interposed Titmouse.

"But it is only due to myself to say *I* can be no party to it, since I have solemnly pledged my word of honor to Mr.——"

"What the devil *do* you mean, Gammon? Cuss me if I can make you out a bit!" interrupted Titmouse snappishly.

"Dem the fellow — why don't
he pay his debts!"

"You misunderstand me, my dear Titmouse! Once for all, I say, if you want the money, you must at once sue on these notes; and my opinion is you'll get the money—only, I *must not appear in it*, you know! But if you choose to employ some other solicitor—there's that Mr. Spitfire, for instance—to *compel* me to give up the notes——"

"O Lord! Honor! No, no!—So bless me, Heaven! I didn't mean anything of the kind," cried Titmouse alarmedly, fearful of offending Gammon.

"I cannot make you understand me, Titmouse! What I mean is, it is my duty not to let my feelings interfere with your interests. I, therefore, advise you immediately to put yourself into the hands—as far as this business is concerned—of some other solicitor, say Mr. Spitfire, in Scorpion Court; and whatever he tells you to do—*do* without hesitation. You will probably tell him that, if he demands the two notes on your behalf, I may, for form's sake, resist; but I know I shall be ordered to give them up! Well—I can't help it!"

"Honor now, Gammon! May I do as I like?" inquired Titmouse.

"On my sacred word of honor!" replied Gammon.

"Then," cried Titmouse joyfully, snapping his fingers, "here's for a jolly squeeze! Ah, ha! Ten thousand drops of blood!—by Jove, he'll bleed to death! But, by the way, what will Mr. Quirk say?"

"Curse Mr. Quirk!" cried Gammon impatiently; "you know the course you are to pursue—you are your own master, surely?"

"To be sure! Well! here's a go! Wasn't it a lucky thought of mine to come here to-night? But don't you forget the other ten thousand—the two makes twenty thousand, by Jove! I'm set up again—ah, ha! And as soon as ever the House is up, if I don't cut away in my span-new yacht, with a lot of jolly chaps, to the East Indies or some *other* place that'll take us a good six weeks or so to go and come back in. Hollo! Is that eleven o'clock striking?" he inquired with a start, taking out his watch. "It is, by Jove! and my pair's up; they'll be dividing—I'm off! Good night."

"You remember where Mr. Spitfire lives?" said Gammon anxiously. "In Scorpion Court, Strand. I must say he's one of the most respectable men in the profession; and *so* quick!"

"Ah—I remember! I'll be with him the moment after breakfast!" replied Titmouse. Gammon shook him by the hand—feeling, when he had shut both his doors, as if he had been playing with an ape.

During the ensuing day, sure enough, he received a letter signed "*Simeon Spitfire*," and dated from "*Scorpion Court*," informing him that its respectable writer "was instructed to apply to him, on the part of Mr. Titmouse, for the immediate delivery up of two promissory notes for £5,000 each, given by one Charles Aubrey to the aforesaid Titmouse," and "begging Mr. Gammon's immediate attention thereto." Gammon immediately copied out and sent a letter which he had prepared beforehand—taking very high ground indeed, but slipping in, with a careful inadvertence, an encouraging admission of the strict *legal* right of Mr. Spitfire's client. Mr. Spitfire instantly forwarded a formal and peremptory demand for the two documents in question. Whereupon Gammon flatly refused to give up the instruments demanded.—Mr. Spitfire then wrote a fine flourishing letter to wind up the correspondence, in the course of which he apprised Mr. Gammon that the Court of King's Bench would be immediately applied to for a rule calling upon him forthwith to deliver up the documents in question, which order was of course promptly issued to him. This was the case reported in the paper given to Mr. Aubrey by Mr. Runnington.

At the earliest moment at which Mr. Aubrey could, without suspicion, extricate himself from the embraces of his overjoyed wife, sister, and children, on his return to Vivian Street, he withdrew to his study, in order to despatch some letters, but principally, as the reader may easily imagine, to peruse the paper given him by Mr. Runnington. He read through the report of the proceedings with exceeding agitation and felt really sick at heart.

"O unfathomable Gammon!" he exclaimed at length, aloud, laying down the paper and sinking into his chair. "Surely I am the weakest, or you the subtlest, of mankind!" He turned over in his thoughts everything that he could recollect of Gammon's conduct from the first moment that they had met. He felt completely baffled and bewildered—and again perused the report of the proceedings in the King's Bench—and would have again relapsed into thought, but his

eye happened to alight on two or three notes lying on his table. He opened the first listlessly; but, on unfolding it, he started violently on recognizing the handwriting of Gammon within; and with mingled wonder and fear read as follows:

"DEAR SIR: God only knows when or where these hasty lines will find you. I am forced to address them to Vivian Street, being in ignorance of your intended movements. My conscience bears me witness that I can say—I can do—no more on your behalf. I am grossly misrepresented. In the *Morning Growl* of to-day you will probably see—if you have not already seen—the report of some proceedings against me, yesterday, in the Court of King's Bench. It may apprise you of *the last* desperate stand I have made in your behalf. Alas! you must prepare for the worst! Mr. Titmouse and his new adviser can have, of course, but *one object* in requiring the surrender of the two promissory notes, which I have already been compelled to give up, under peril of an attachment for contempt of court. Yet, once more—if you are not blinded and infatuated beyond all example or belief—I implore you, in the name of Heaven—by every consideration that should influence a man of honor and of feeling—fly!—lose not a *second* after reading these lines (which I entreat you to destroy when read), or *that second* may involve your ruin—and the ruin of all connected with you! Believe me your distressed—your unalterable friend, O. G."

Mr. Aubrey laid down this letter, and, sinking back again into his chair, yielded for some moments to an impulse very nearly akin to despair. Within a few minutes' time after the receipt of this letter, the wretched and almost heart-broken man was a second time in custody, and at the suit of Tittlebat Titmouse, Esq., M.P., for the principal sum of ten thousand pounds, and interest for twelve months at the rate of five pounds *per centum per annum*. The agonizing scene which ensued I shall leave entirely to the reader's imagination—observing only that the two minions of the law into whose hands Aubrey had now fallen seemed totally indifferent to the anguish they witnessed. However, within a few days, Mr. Runnington, by duly completing special bail in the two

actions of *Quirk and Others* v. *Aubrey* and *Titmouse* v. *Aubrey*, had relieved Mr. Aubrey from all grounds of immediate personal apprehension for several months to come—for at least half a year.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN WHICH THE EARL OF DREDDLINGTON IN AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. GAMMON RECEIVES A SHOCK THAT HE IS UNABLE TO SUSTAIN

When Mr. Gammon returned to Yatton from the late Lady Stratton's residence, he found several letters awaiting his arrival. One was from Mr. Quirk—poor muddle-headed old soul!—all went wrong with him, the moment that he missed Gammon from beside him. Then came a letter from the Earl of Dreddlington, marked "*private and confidential*," containing a most important communication, to the effect that his lordship had that day granted an audience to a scientific gentleman of great eminence, and particularly well skilled in geology, who had discovered after a very close geological survey of the superficial strata of the Isle of Dogs that at a very little depth from the surface there ran in parallel strata rich beds of copper, lead, and coal, alternately, such as could not possibly fail of making a quick and enormous return. His lordship, therefore, suggested the immediate formation of a company to purchase the Isle of Dogs and work the mines!—and "begged to be favored with" Mr. Gammon's views on this subject, by return of post. In a postscript, his lordship informed Gammon that he had just parted with all his Golden Egg shares at a considerable profit; and that the Gunpowder and Freshwater Company's shares were rising daily, on account of the increasing probability of a universal war.

Gammon wrote off a very polite and confidential letter to the Earl, begging his lordship would do him the honor of taking no steps in the matter till Mr. Gammon could have the honor of waiting upon his lordship in town. This letter over, Gammon wrote off another to the secretary of the Vulture Insurance Company, giving them notice of the death of Lady Stratton, who was insured in their office in a policy to the amount of £15,000, to which, her ladyship having died

intestate, the writer's client, Tittlebat Titmouse, Esq., M.P. for Yatton, had become entitled as only next of kin; that Mr. Titmouse intended to administer forthwith, and formal evidence would be furnished to the company, in due time, of the completion of Mr. Titmouse's legal title to the policy.

But here—I am concerned to say—the skittish, frolicsome, and malicious jade, Fortune, after petting and fondling Titmouse, and overwhelming him with her favors, suddenly turned round and hit him a severe slap in the face, without the least provocation on his part, or rime or reason on hers. And it happened in this wise: DAPPER SMUG, Esq., the secretary of the Vulture, wrote by return of post, saying that he had laid Mr. Gammon's letter before the directors; and that so soon as he should have learned their pleasure on the subject, he would write to Mr. Gammon again. And so he did—but only to request that gentleman to communicate with Messrs. Screw and Son, the company's solicitors. This Mr. Gammon did, and in due time received a letter saying that they had carefully considered the case, and regretted sincerely that they could not feel it their duty to recommend the directors to pay the policy!!

Gammon wrote in astonishment to know the grounds of their refusal, and at length discovered that that truly respectable company considered themselves in possession of decisive evidence to show that the policy was vitiated through the concealment, or rather the *non-communication*, of a material fact on the part of the late Lady Stratton—possibly unintentionally—viz., that she was, at the time of executing the policy, *subject to the* GOUT. Gammon made anxious inquiries of the servants, of Dr. Goddart, Mr. Parkinson, and of others, who expressed infinite astonishment, declaring that she had never once exhibited the slightest symptoms of the complaint. Messrs. Screw, however, were politely inflexible—they declared that they had the positive testimony of several witnesses, one of them an eminent physician, to the fact that, during the very week in which the policy had been executed, she had experienced an attack of gout which had confined her to the sofa for three days. (The simple fact was, that her ladyship had about that time certainly been confined to the sofa, but merely from her heel having been galled a little by a tight shoe.) They, moreover, sent to Mr. Gammon the full

name of the officer in whose name the company was to be sued—the aforesaid Dapper Smug; and recommended Mr. Gammon to forward process to them in the usual way.

The sudden and unexpected rebuff encountered by Mr. Gammon, in the Vulture Insurance Company's refusal to pay the policy on the late Lady Stratton's life, was calculated seriously to embarrass his complicated movements. Nor was this the only trouble—the only reverse—that about this period occurred to him.

On applying at Doctor's Commons, in the ordinary way, for a grant to Mr. Titmouse of Letters of Administration to Lady Stratton, Mr. Gammon discovered the existence of a CAVEAT, which ran thus:

"Let nothing be done in the goods of Dame Mary Stratton, late of Warkleigh, in the parish of Warkleigh, in the county of York, deceased, unknown to Obadiah Pounce, proctor for *John Thomas*, having interest."

Mr. Gammon, however, very naturally concluded that the move was made on the behalf of Mr. Aubrey, and that the ground of his opposition was the alleged will of Lady Stratton. However, the more immediate object of his anxieties was to conceal as far as possible his connection with the various joint-stock speculations, into which he had entered with a wild and feverish anxiety to realize a rapid fortune. He had already withdrawn from one or two with which he had been only for a brief time, and secretly, connected—but not until he had realized no inconsiderable sum by his judicious but somewhat unscrupulous operations. He was also anxious, if practicable, to extricate Lord Dreddlington, at the proper conjuncture, with as little damage as possible to his lordship's fortune or character; for his lordship's countenance and good offices were becoming of greater consequence to Mr. Gammon than ever.

The slender faculties of Lord Dreddlington had been for months in a state of novel and grateful excitement, through the occupation afforded them by his connection with the fashionable modes of commercial enterprise—joint-stock companies, the fortunate members of which got rich they scarcely knew how. 'Twas, indeed, ecstasy to poor old Lord Dred-

dlington to behold his name, from time to time, glittering in the van—himself figuring as a chief patron—a prime mover —in some vast and lucrative undertaking, which almost, from the first moment of its projection, attracted the notice and confidence of the moneyed classes and became productive to its originators!

Many attempts were made by his brother peers, and those who once had considerable influence over him, to open his eyes to the very questionable nature of the concerns to which he was so freely lending the sanction of his name and personal interference; but his pride and obstinacy caused him to turn a deaf ear to their suggestions; and the skilful and delicious flatteries of Mr. Gammon and others, seconded by the substantial fruits of his various speculations, urged him on from step to step, till he became one of the most active and constant in his interference with the concern of one or two great speculations, and from which he looked forward to realizing, at no very distant day, the most resplendent results. Never had one man obtained over another a more complete mastery than had Mr. Gammon over the Earl of Dreddlington, at whose exclusive table he was a frequent guest, thereby obtaining opportunities of acquiring the goodwill of other persons of the Earl's status and caliber.

His lordship was sitting in his library one morning, with a newspaper of the day before, a certain portion of which he had read over several times with exquisite satisfaction. He had, late on the preceding evening, returned from his seat, so that it was not until the time at which he is now presented to the reader that his lordship had had an opportunity of perusing what was now affording him such gratification, viz., a brief but highly flattering report of a splendid white-bait dinner which had been given to him the day before at Blackwall by a party of some thirty gentlemen, who were founders, managers, and directors of various popular joint-stock companies; and the progress of which, in public estimation, had been materially accelerated by the countenance of so distinguished a nobleman as the Right Hon. the Earl of Dreddlington, G.C.B., etc., etc., etc.

Covers had been laid for thirty-five; and the entertainment was in all respects of the most sumptuous description—every way worthy of the entertainers and their distinguished guest.

Not far from the Earl sat Mr. Gammon—methinks I see now his gentlemanly figure—his dark-blue coat, white waistcoat, and simple black stock—his calm smile, his keen watchful eye, his well-developed forehead, suggesting to you a capability of the highest kind of intellectual action. The Earl soon mounted into the seventh heaven of delight; he had never experienced anything of this sort before; he felt GLORIFIED—for such qualities were attributed to him in the after-dinner speeches, as even he had not before imagined the existence of in himself; his ears were ravished with the sound of his own praises. Mr. Titmouse, M.P., also came in for his share of laudation, and made—said the report in the *Morning Growl*—a brief but very spirited speech, in return for his health being proposed. At length, it being time to think of returning to town, his lordship withdrew, Sir Sharper Bubble (the chairman) and others attending him bareheaded to his carriage, which, his lordship and Titmouse having entered it, drove off amidst the bows and courteous inclinations of the gentlemen standing on and around the steps. Titmouse almost immediately fell asleep, overpowered by the prodigious quantity of champagne and claret which he had taken, and thus left the Earl, who was himself in a much more buoyant humor than was usual with him, to revel in the recollection of the homage which he had been receiving.

Now this was the affair, of which a very flourishing tho brief account (privately paid for by the gentleman who sent it) appeared in the *Morning Growl*, with a most magnificent speech of his lordship's about free trade, and the expansive principles of commercial enterprise, and so forth. 'Twas true that the Earl had no recollection of either having meditated the delivery of any such speech or actually delivering it—but he might have done so for all that, and possibly did. He read over the whole account half-a-dozen times at least. He secretly owned to himself that he was not entirely undeserving of the compliments which had been paid to him.

Still he had his drawbacks. He became more and more sensible that Lady Cecilia was not happy in her union with Mr. Titmouse, and that his conduct was not calculated to make her so; in fact, his lordship began to suspect that there was a total incompatibility of tempers and dispositions, which would inevitably force on a separation—under existing

circumstances a painful step and eminently unadvisable. His lordship's numerous inquiries of Mr. Gammon as to the state of Mr. Titmouse's property met occasionally with unsatisfactory and most inconsistent answers. Mr. Titmouse's extravagant expenditure was a matter of notoriety; the Earl himself had been once or twice compelled to come forward, in order to assist in relieving his son-in-law's house from executions; and he repeatedly reasoned and remonstrated with Mr. Titmouse on the impropriety of many parts of his conduct—Titmouse generally acknowledging, with much appearance of compunction and sincerity, that the Earl had too much ground for complaint, and protesting that he meant to change altogether one of these days. Indeed, matters would soon have been brought to a crisis between the Earl and Titmouse had the Earl not been so constantly immersed in business as to prevent his mind from dwelling upon the various instances of Titmouse's misconduct which from time to time came under his notice. The condition of Lady Cecilia was one which gave the Earl anxiety and interest. She was *enceinte;* and the prospect which this afforded the Earl of the family honors continuing in a course of direct descent, gave him unspeakable satisfaction.

The above will suffice to indicate the course taken by his lordship's thoughts on the present occasion. He sat back in his chair in a sort of reverie; having laid down his paper, and placed his gold spectacles on the little stand beside him, where lay also his massive old gold repeater. The *Morning Growl* of that morning was very late, owing to the arrival of foreign news; but it was brought in to his lordship just as he was beginning to open his letters. These his lordship laid aside for a moment, in order to skim over the contents of his paper; on which he had not been long engaged, before his eye lit upon a paragraph that gave him a dreadful shock. He read it over several times, almost doubting whether he could be reading correctly. The intelligence conveyed by the paragraph in question was simply this—that the ARTIFICIAL RAIN COMPANY had suddenly evaporated!—and that this result had been precipitated by the astounding discovery that the managing director of the company had *bolted* with all the available funds of the society—and who should this be, but the gentleman who had presided so ably the evening

before over the Blackwall dinner to his lordship, viz., Sir Sharper Bubble!!! The plain fact was that that worthy had, at that very time, completed all arrangements necessary for taking the very decisive step on which he had determined; and within an hour's time of handing the Earl of

"Account closed"!

Dreddlington to his carriage in the way that has been described, had slipped into a boat moored by the waterside, and got safely on board a fine brig bound for America.

As soon as the Earl had recovered a little from his agitation he ordered his carriage and was soon on his way, at a

great speed, toward the Poultry, in the City, where was the office of the company, with the faintest glimmer of a hope that there might be some mistake about the matter. The words "ARTIFICIAL RAIN COMPANY" still shone, in gilt letters half a foot long, on the green blind of the window on the ground floor! All still—deserted—dry as Gideon's fleece! Stepping into his carriage, he ordered it to drive on to Lombard Street, to the late company's bankers. As soon as he had, with a little indistinctness arising from his agitation, mentioned the words "Artificial Rain——"

"Account closed!" was the brief matter-of-fact answer, given in a business-like and peremptory tone, the speaker immediately attending to some one else. The Earl was too much agitated to observe a knowing wink interchanged among the clerks behind, as soon as they had caught the words "Artificial Rain Company"! The Earl, with increasing agitation, re-entered his carriage, and ordered it to be driven to the office of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap. There he arrived in a trice, but being informed that Gammon had not yet come, and would probably be found at his chambers in Thavies' Inn, the horses' heads were forthwith turned, and within a few minutes' time the carriage had drawn up opposite to the entrance to Thavies' Inn. Without sending his servant on beforehand to inquire, his lordship immediately alighted, and soon found Mr. Gammon's chambers on the first floor. His lordship's hasty summons was answered by Mr. Gammon's laundress, who informed the Earl that if he wished to see Mr. Gammon, he had better step in and wait for a minute or two, as Mr. Gammon had only just gone to the stationer's, a little way off, and had said he should be back in a minute or two. As the Earl sat down, his eye could scarcely fail to read the superscription in large round hand, on an imposing document which was turned full toward him, and which ran thus:

"TITTLEBAT TITMOUSE, Esq. to Oily Gammon, *Gent.* } Grant of RENT-CHARGE on Estates at Yatton, of £2,000 *per annum*."

This almost stopped the Earl's breath. With trembling hands he put on his spectacles, to assure himself that he read correctly, and, with a face overspread with dismay, was

gazing intently at the writing, holding the parchment in his hands; when Mr. Gammon entered, having shot across the inn, and sprung up-stairs with lightning speed, the instant that his eye had caught Lord Dreddlington's equipage standing opposite to the inn. He had instantly recollected having left on the table the deed in question, which had been executed by Titmouse only the evening before; and little anticipated that of all persons upon earth, Lord Dreddlington would be the first whose eye would light upon it. 'Twas, perhaps, somewhat indiscreet to leave it there; but it was in Gammon's own private residence—where he had very few visitors, especially at that time of the day—and he had intended only a momentary absence, having gone out on the impulse of a sudden suggestion. See the result!

"My Lord Dreddlington!" exclaimed Gammon, breathless with haste and agitation, the instant he saw his worst apprehensions fulfilled. The Earl looked up at him, as it were mechanically, over his glasses, without moving or attempting to speak.

"I—I—beg your lordship's pardon!" he added quickly and sternly, advancing toward Lord Dreddlington. "Pardon me, but surely your lordship cannot be aware of the liberty you are taking—my private papers!"

"Sir—Mr. Gammon!" at length exclaimed the Earl in a faltering voice, "what is the meaning of that?" pointing with a tremulous finger to the conveyance.

"*What is it?* A private—a strictly private document of mine, my lord," replied Gammon with breathless impetuosity, his eye flashing fury, and his face having become deadly pale; "one with which your lordship has no more concern than has your footman—one which I surely might have fancied safe from intrusive eyes in *my own private residence*—one which I am confounded—yes, confounded! my lord, at finding that you could for an instant allow yourself—consider yourself warranted in even looking at—prying into—and much less presuming to ask questions concerning it." He held the parchment all this while tightly grasped in his hands; his appearance and manner might have overpowered a man of stronger nerves than the Earl of Dreddlington. On him, however, it appeared to produce no impression, and he simply inquired, without moving from his chair, "Is it a fact, sir,

that you have obtained a rent-charge of two thousand a year upon my son-in-law's property at Yatton?"

"I deny peremptorily your lordship's right to ask me a single question arising out of information obtained in such a dis—I mean such an unprecedented manner!" answered Gammon, vehemently.

"Mr. Gammon, I must and will have this matter explained; depend upon it, I will have it looked into and thoroughly sifted," at length said Lord Dreddlington.

"Can your lordship derive any right to information from me, out of any act of your lordship's which no honorable mind—nay, if your lordship insists on my making myself understood—I will say, an act which no gentleman would resort to, unless——" The Earl rose from his chair with calmness and dignity.

"What *your* notions of honorable or gentlemanly conduct may happen to be, sir," said the old peer, drawing himself up to his full height, and speaking with his usual deliberation, "it may not be worth my while to inquire; but let me tell you, sir——"

"My lord, I beg your forgiveness—I have certainly been hurried by my excitement into expressions which I would gladly withdraw."

"Hear me, sir," replied the Earl, with a composure which, under the circumstances, was wonderful; "it is the first time in my life that any one has presumed to speak to me in such a manner and to use such language; and I will neither forget it, sir, nor forgive it."

"Then, my lord, I take the liberty of reasserting what I had withdrawn," said Gammon, his blood tingling in all his veins. He had never given Lord Dreddlington credit for being able to exhibit the spirit and self-command which he was then displaying. The Earl bowed loftily as Gammon spoke, and, on his concluding, said with haughty composure:

"When I entered your room, sir, that document caught my eye accidentally; and on seeing upon the outside of it—for no further have I looked—the name of my own son-in-law, it was but natural that I should suppose there could be no objection to my looking further, at the outside. That was my opinion, sir—that *is* my opinion; your presumptuous expressions, sir, cannot change my opinion, nor make me

forget our relative positions," he added loftily; "and I once more demand, sir, what is the meaning of that extraordinary document?"

"Since your lordship desires information from me, let me request you to be seated," said he, in a tone and with an

"That document caught my eye accidentally"

air of profound courtesy such as, in its turn, took his noble companion by surprise; and he slowly resumed his seat, Gammon also sitting down nearly opposite to him. "May I, in the first place, ask to what circumstance I am indebted, my lord, for the honor of this visit?" he inquired.

"Oh, sir—sir—by the way—indeed you may well ask—you must have heard," suddenly and vehemently interrupted the Earl, whose mind could hold but one important matter at a time.

"To what does your lordship allude?" inquired Gammon, who knew perfectly well all the while. Having had a hint that matters were going wrong with the Artificial Rain Company, he had contrived to creep out of it, by selling such shares as he held, at a little loss certainly—and he would have done the same for the Earl had it been practicable; but his lordship's sudden journey into Hertfordshire had prevented his communicating with his lordship till the time for acting had passed. Now, therefore, he resolved to be taken by surprise.

"To what do I allude, sir!" echoed the Earl with much agitation, taking the newspaper from his pocket. "The Artificial Rain Company, sir, is gone! Blown up! Entirely disappeared, sir!"

"The Artificial Rain Company? O my lord, it's impossible!"

"Sir—it is clean gone. Sir Sharper Bubble has absconded!"

His lordship handed the paper to Mr. Gammon, who read the paragraph (which he had read some hour or two before) with every appearance of horror.

"It cannot—it *cannot* be true, my lord!" said he.

"Sir, it *is*. I have been myself to the company's office—it is quite closed—shut up; there is no one there, sir! And at the banker's the only answer is—'Account closed!'"

"Then I am nearly a couple of thousand pounds poorer—my God! what shall I do? Do, my lord, let us drive off instantly to Sir Sharper Bubble's house, and see if he be really gone. It may be a villainous fabrication altogether—I never will believe that such a man—how miserable, that both your lordship and I should have been out of town yesterday!"

Thus Gammon went on with great eagerness, hoping to occupy Lord Dreddlington's thoughts exclusively with the matter; but he was mistaken. The Earl, after a little pause, reverted to the previous topic, and repeated his inquiry as to the rent-charge, with an air of such serious determination as soon satisfied Gammon that there was no evading the crisis which had so suddenly arisen. With the topic his lord-

ship also unconsciously changed his manner, which was now one of offended majesty.

"Sir," said he with stately deliberation, "what you have said to myself personally can not be unsaid; but I desire a plain answer, Mr. Gammon, to a plain question. Is the document which I had in my hand an instrument giving you—gracious Heaven!—a charge of two thousand pounds a year upon my son-in-law's estate? Sir, once for all, I peremptorily insist on an answer before I leave your chambers; and, if I do not obtain it, I shall instantly cause a rigorous inquiry to be set on foot."

("You obstinate, driveling old fool!" thought Gammon, looking the while with mild anxiety at the Earl; "if you were *to drop down dead at my feet*, now, at this moment what vexation you would save me! Did it ever before fall to the lot of mortal man to have to deal with two such idiots as you and Titmouse?")

"Well, then, my lord, since you are so pertinacious on the point—I disdain equivocation or further concealment, and distinctly admit that the document which was lately in your lordship's hands *is* an instrument having the effect which it professes to have. It gives me, my lord, a rent-charge for the term of my life of two thousand pounds a year upon Mr. Titmouse's estate of Yatton."

"Good God, sir!" exclaimed the Earl, gazing at Gammon as if thunderstruck.

"That is the fact, my lord," said Gammon.

"There never was such a thing heard of, sir! Two thousand pounds a year given to his solicitor by my son-in-law! Why, he is a mere boy——"

"He was old enough to marry the Lady Cecilia, my lord," interrupted Gammon calmly, but very bitterly.

"That may be, sir," replied the Earl, his face flushing, "but he is ignorant of business, sir, or you must have taken advantage of him when he was intoxicated."

"Nothing of the kind, my lord. Never was Mr. Titmouse more sober—never in fuller possession of his faculties—never did he do anything more deliberately than when he signed that conveyance."

"Have you purchased it, sir—given consideration for it?" inquired the Earl, with a perplexed air.

"Yes, my lord. I *have* given value for it—full value; and Mr. Titmouse, if you ask him, will tell you so."

"And is the consideration recorded in the deed, sir?"

"It is, my lord—and truly."

"Then why all this mystery, Mr. Gammon?"

"Let me ask, in my turn, my lord, why all these questions about a matter with which you have nothing to do? Would it not be much better for your lordship to attend to *your own* affairs, just now, after the very alarming——"

"Sir—sir—I—I—that is—*my* concern," stammered the Earl, very nearly thrust out of his course by this stroke of Gammon's; but he soon recovered himself, for the topic they were discussing had taken a thorough hold of his mind.

"Did you give a pecuniary consideration, Mr. Gammon?"

"I gave a large sum in ready money; and the remainder of the consideration is expressed to be my long and arduous services to Mr. Titmouse in putting him into possession of his property."

"Will you, then, favor me with a copy of this deed, that I may examine it and submit it to competent——"

"No, my lord, I will do no such thing," replied Gammon peremptorily.

"But one conclusion can be drawn, then, from your refusal, sir—one highly disadvantageous to you, sir. No one can avoid the conclusion that there has been foul play and fraud——"

"You are a peer of the realm, Lord Dreddlington; try to be a *gentleman*," said Gammon, who had turned deadly pale. The Earl's eye continued fixed on Gammon and his lip slightly quivered. He seemed amazed at Gammon's audacity.

"Let me recommend your lordship to be more cautious and measured in your language," said Gammon, visibly struggling to speak with calmness, "especially concerning matters on which you are utterly—profoundly ignorant——"

"I will not long remain so, Mr. Gammon; you may rely upon it," replied the Earl with sustained firmness and hauteur.

("Shall I? shall I? *shall* I prostrate you, insolent old fool! soul and body?" thought Gammon.)

"I will instantly seek out Mr. Titmouse," continued the

Earl, "and will soon get at the bottom of this—this—monstrous transaction."

"I cannot, of course, control your lordship's motions. If you *do* apply to Mr. Titmouse, you will in all probability receive the information you seek for—that is, if Mr. Titmouse *dare* without first consulting *me*——"

"If—Mr.—Titmouse—*dare*, sir?" echoes the Earl calmly and scornfully.

"Yes—*dare!*" furiously retorted Gammon.

"Sir, this is very highly amusing!" said Lord Dreddlington, trying to smile; but it was impossible. His hands trembled so much that he could not draw on his glove without great effort.

"To *me*, my lord, it is very—very painful," replied Gammon, with an agitation which he could not conceal; "not painful on my own account, but your lordship's——"

"Sir, I thank you for your sympathy," interrupted Lord Dreddlington with a faint smile. "In the mean while you may depend upon my taking steps forthwith of a somewhat decisive character. We shall see, sir, how long transactions of this sort can be concealed."

At this point Gammon finally determined upon making his long-dreaded disclosure to the Earl of Dreddlington—one that would instantly topple him down headlong over the battlements of his lofty and unapproachable pride, as though he had been struck by lightning.

"Your lordship has spoken of *concealment*," he commenced with visible emotion. "Your lordship's offensive and most uncalled-for observations upon my motives and conduct irritated me for the moment—but that is gone by. They have, however, worked my feelings up to a point which will enable me to make a disclosure to your lordship of a secret, that ever since it has come to my knowledge, so help me Heaven! has made me the most miserable of men." There was something in Gammon's manner that compelled the Earl to sit down again in the chair from which he had arisen, and where he remained gazing in wondering silence at Gammon, who proceeded. "It is a disclosure which will require all your lordship's strength of mind to prevent its overpowering you——"

"Sir, I desire that, without so much circumlocution, you

will come to the point. I beg of you sir, to tell me what you know, and leave me to bear it as best I can."

"Your lordship shall be obeyed, then. I said, some little time ago, that the instrument granting me the rent-charge upon the Yatton property recited, as a part of the consideration, my arduous and long-continued and successful exertions to place Mr. Titmouse in possession of that fine estate. It was I, my lord, that searched for him till I found him—the rightful heir to the Yatton estates, the possible successor to your lordship in your ancient barony. Therefore, I required him—nay, I extorted from him the instrument in question." He paused.

"Well, sir. Go on! I hear you," said the Earl somewhat sternly; on which Gammon resumed. "At the time that I discovered Mr. Titmouse behind the counter of Mr. Tag-rag, in Oxford Street, and up till within a couple of months ago, I had no more doubt about his being really entitled, as heir-at-law——" The Earl gave a sudden start. "My lord, I would even now beg your lordship to let me take some other opportunity, when we are both calmer."

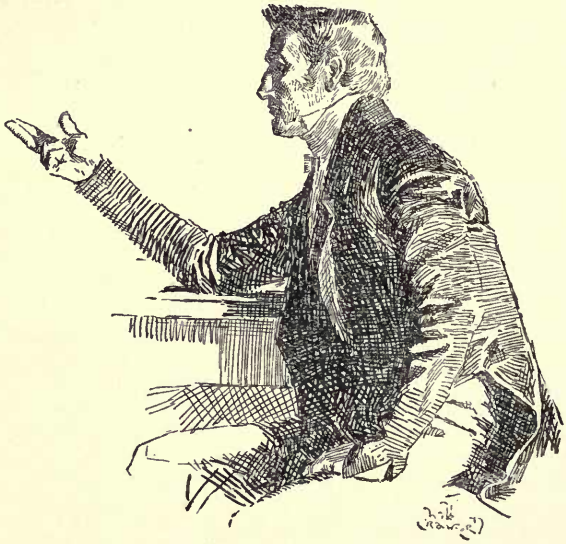
"Go on, sir," said the Earl firmly, but in a lower tone of voice than he had before spoken in, and sitting with his eyes rivetted on those of Mr. Gammon, who, notwithstanding his lordship's observation, was compelled by his own sickening agitation to pause for a moment or two. Then he resumed. "I was saying that till about two months ago I had no more doubt, than I have of your lordship's now sitting before me, that Mr. Titmouse was the legitimate descendant of the person entitled to enjoy the Yatton estates in preference to Mr. Aubrey. His pedigree was subjected to the severest scrutiny that the law of England can devise, and was pronounced complete—but, to my horror—only *I* know it, except Mr. Titmouse, to whom I told it—I have discovered, by a most extraordinary accident, that we were, and are, all mistaken." Lord Dreddlington had grown deadly pale, and his lips seemed to open unconsciously, while he inclined toward Gammon; "and—I may as well tell your lordship at once the worst—this young man, Titmouse, is only a natural son, and what is worse, of a woman who had a former husband living——"

Lord Dreddlington started up from his chair, and stag-

gered away from it—his face the very picture of horror. It was ghastly to look at. His lips moved, but he uttered no sound.

"Oh, my lord! For God's sake be calm!" cried out Gammon, dreadfully shocked, rushing toward the Earl, who kept staggering back, his hands stretched out as if to keep off some approaching object. "My lord! Lord Dreddlington, hear me! For Heaven's sake, let me bring you back to your

"Titmouse is only a natural son"



chair. It's only a little faintness!" He put his arm round the Earl, endeavoring to draw him back toward the easy-chair; but he felt his lordship slipping down on the floor, his legs yielding under him; then his head suddenly sank on one side, and the next moment he collapsed, upon the floor, partly supported by Gammon, who, in a fearful state of agitation, shouted out for the laundress.

"Untie his handkerchief, sir; loose his shirt-collar!" cried the woman, and stooping down she removed the pressure from his neck. He was breathing heavily. "The carriage standing before the inn is his lordship's," gasped Gammon, "you'll see his footman—tell him his lordship's in a fit, and send him for a doctor!"

Gammon finding no signs of returning consciousness, with a great effort managed to get his lordship into the bedroom. For a few frightful moments he felt as if he had murdered Lord Dreddlington, and must fly for it. He pressed his hands to his forehead as if to recall his scattered faculties.

"What is to be done?" thought he. "Is this apoplexy? paralysis? or what? Will he recover? Will it affect his reason? *Will he recover?* If so—how deal with the damning discovery he has made? Will he have sense enough to keep his own counsel? If he recover, and preserve his reason—all is right—everything succeeds. I am his master to the end of his days! What a horrid while they are! Curse those doctors! never to be found when they are wanted. He's dying before my very eyes! How shall I say this happened? A fit, brought on by agitation occasioned by the failure of the company. Ah—there's the newspaper he brought with him and put into my hands," he thought as his eye glanced at the newspaper lying on the table in the adjoining room. "This will give color to my version of the affair!" With this, he hastily seized the paper and thrust it into one of the coat-pockets of Lord Dreddlington; and the moment after, in came the footman with a doctor, to whom Gammon with haste and agitation gave that account of his lordship's seizure upon which he had determined.

The jugular vein was opened in a trice; mustard plasters and hot water applied as quickly as they could be procured; and, a cupping-case having been sent for, blood was taken pretty freely from the nape of the neck—and these two bloodlettings saved Lord Dreddlington's life—whether to Gammon's delight or disappointment I shall not take upon me to say. Then Gammon himself set off in a hackney-coach, about an hour before the carriage started, in order to prepare the household of the Earl and to secure a safe communication of the alarming event to the Lady Cecilia.

On reaching the Earl's house, to Gammon's surprise a hackney-coach was driving off from before the door; and, on entering the house, guess his amazement at hearing that Lady Cecilia with Miss Macspleuchan had just gone up-stairs in terrible trouble. The plain fact was that she had just been driven out of her own house by a couple of executions put in that morning by two creditors of Titmouse. As soon as Mr. Gammon found the means of doing it unobserved, he made a sign to Miss Macspleuchan that he had something of great importance to communicate to her. Leaving the Lady Cecilia in the care of her maid, Miss Macspleuchan followed Mr. Gammon down-stairs into the library, and was in a few hurried words apprised of the illness of the Earl—of the cause of it (viz., the sudden failure of an important speculation in which the Earl was interested)—and that his lordship would be brought home in about an hour's time or so, in company with a medical man. Gently and gradually as Miss Macspleuchan broke the intelligence to Lady Cecilia it occasioned her falling into a swoon. On recovering she requested Mr. Gammon to be sent for, and with considerable agitation inquired into the occasion and manner of the Earl's illness. As soon as he had mentioned that it was a paragraph in the day's paper that first occasioned in the Earl the agitation which had induced such serious consequences——

"What! in the papers already? Is it about that fellow Titmouse?" she inquired with a languid air of disgust.

"No, indeed, Lady Cecilia, Mr. Titmouse has nothing to do with it," replied Gammon, with a slight inward spasm; and just as he had succeeded in giving her to understand the cause to which he chose to refer the Earl's illness, carriage wheels were heard, followed in a second or two by a tremendous thundering at the door, which made even Gammon almost start from his chair and threw Lady Cecilia into a second swoon. Gammon stepped for an instant to the window—he saw the poor old peer in the state I have described, and the sight blanched his cheeks.

Leaving her ladyship in the hands of Miss Macspleuchan, he followed into the Earl's bedroom, and was a little relieved at finding that the Earl was in a much more satisfactory state than could have been anticipated. As his lord-

ship's own physician (who had been summoned on the Earl's arrival home) intimated that repose was essential to his lordship, and that no one should remain in the room whose services were not indispensable, Gammon took his departure, after an anxious inquiry as to Lady Cecilia, intending to return before night, personally to make his inquiries concerning the Earl and her ladyship.

CHAPTER XXIX

DISCLOSES THE AWFUL CONSEQUENCES OF MR. GAMMON'S ACTION, BECAUSE OF WHICH THE READER BIDS AN ETERNAL FAREWELL TO THE POOR LADY CECILIA

A MIGHTY sigh escaped from the oppressed bosom of Gammon as soon as, having quitted the house, he found himself in the street alone. He soon, however, recovered himself, and began very seriously to contemplate the position in which he now found himself placed. Here was Lord Dreddlington involved to a most alarming extent in respect of his connection with one of the bubble companies, into an alliance with which it had been Gammon who seduced him. But he quickly lost sight of that, as a very light matter compared with what had subsequently happened, and with the prodigious consequences to which this might possibly lead—and that, too, immediately.

This crisis had been precipitated by an accident—an occurrence which he felt that no man could have foreseen. Certainly it might all be traced to his own oversight in leaving the conveyance of his rent-charge upon his table, tho for only a minute or two's absence; for he had not quitted his chambers more than five minutes before he had re-entered them, finding the Earl of Dreddlington there—of all persons in the world, the very last whom Gammon would have wished to be aware of the existence of such an instrument. Who could have imagined such an occurrence? Never before had the Earl visited him at his own private residence; and to come just precisely at the very moment—and yet, thought Gammon, almost starting back a step or two, when one came to think of it, what was more likely than, on seeing the paragraph in the morning paper, that his lordship should have done the very thing he had, and driven down to Mr. Gammon for an explanation? Bah! thought Mr. Gammon, and stamped his foot on the pavement.

"But the thing is done; and what am I now to do? What can I do? First of all, there's Titmouse—where is that little

miscreant at this moment? Will he follow his wife to Grosvenor Square? Will the Earl have recovered, before I can see Titmouse, sufficiently to recollect what has happened? Will they allow him to be admitted into the sick-chamber? Suppóse his presence should remind the Earl of what he had this day heard? Suppose he should recover his senses—what course will he take? Will he acquaint his daughter that she is married to a vulgar bastard—oh, frightful!—she and he the two proudest persons, perhaps, living! Will they spurn him from them with loathing and horror—expose the little impostor to the world—and take, God knows what steps against *me*, for the share I have had in the matter? Oh, impossible!—inconceivable! They can never blazon their own degradation to the world! Or will Lord Dreddlington have discretion and self-command sufficient to keep the blighting secret to himself? Will he rest satisfied with my statement, or insist on conclusive proof and corroboration? Will he call for vouchers—ah!" here he ground his teeth together, for he recollected the trick which Titmouse had played him in destroying the precious documents already spoken of. "If the little wretch does not hear of what has happened from any one else, shall I tell him that I have communicated his secret to Lord Dreddlington? Fancy him and his wife meeting after they know all!—or him and the Earl! Suppose the Earl should *die*—and without having disclosed this secret to any one? What a godsend would that be!"

Some five minutes afterward he was startled out of his meditations by hearing a voice calling out his name, and, looking toward the middle of the street, beheld Mr. Titmouse beckoning to him out of a hackney-coach, which at Titmouse's bidding drew up to the curbstone.

"Oh—I say!—Mr. Gammon!—'pon my life—*here's* a precious mess!—Such a devil of a row!" commenced Titmouse alarmedly, speaking in a low voice through the coach window.

"What, sir?" inquired Gammon sternly.

"Why—eh? heard of it? Lady Cicely——"

"I *have* heard of it, sir," replied Gammon gloomily, "and I have, in my turn, something of far greater consequence to tell you. Let the coachman turn back and drive you to my chambers, where I will meet you in a quarter of an hour's time."

"O Lord! Won't you get in and tell me *now*?—Do, Mr. Gam——"

"No, sir!" replied Gammon sternly, and walked away, leaving Titmouse in a pretty fright.

"Now, shall I tell him or not?" thought Gammon, and, after some minutes' anxious consideration, determined on doing so—and on threatening him that if he did not change his courses, so far as money went, he—Gammon—would instantly blast him, by exposure of his real character and circumstances to the whole world. What might be the actual extent of his embarrassments, Gammon knew not, nor was he aware of the fact that Titmouse was at that moment getting into the hands of swindling money-lenders. In point of dress and manners, Titmouse was the same that he had ever been since fortune had given him the means of dressing according to his fancy and the fashion; but any one looking at his face could see the results of excess and debauchery. When Gammon joined him at his chambers and told him the events of the day, Titmouse exhibited affright that to any other beholder would have appeared ludicrous; but as Gammon's object was to subdue and terrify his companion into an implicit submission to his will, he dismissed him for the day, simply enjoining him to keep away from Grosvenor Square and Park Lane till an early hour in the ensuing morning—by which time events, which might have happened in the interval, might determine the course which Gammon should dictate to Titmouse. At that time Gammon was strongly inclined to insist on Titmouse's going to the Continent for a little while, to be out of harm's way; but, in fact, he felt dreadfully embarrassed to know how to dispose of Titmouse—regarding him with feelings somewhat, perhaps, akin to those with which Frankenstein beheld his monster.

But to return to Lord Dreddlington. The remedies resorted to so speedily after his seizure at Mr. Gammon's chambers had most materially counteracted the effects of the terrible shock which he had sustained. Shortly after his removal to his own house, he sank into tranquil sleep, which continued, with a few interruptions, for several hours. Toward seven o'clock in the evening there were sitting on one side of the bed Miss Macspleuchan, and on the other

the Lady Cecilia—who also had rallied from the shock which she had sustained, and now, occasionally shedding tears, sat gazing in melancholy silence at the countenance of her father. She was certainly a miserable young woman—ignorant tho she might be of the real extent of disaster consequent upon her alliance with Titmouse, whom she had hated and despised. Their almost total estrangement was notorious in society. At length the Earl, who had become rather restless, faintly muttered the words:

"Bubble—villain—Blackwall——"

"You see," whispered Miss Macspleuchan, "what he's thinking of. He dined with those people, you know," Lady Cecilia nodded in silence. Presently his lordship resumed—

"*Account closed!*—Is Mr. Gammon at home——"

The current of his recollections had now brought him to the point of danger; and a troubled expression came over his face—he was evidently realizing the commencement of the terrible scene in Mr. Gammon's room—then he seemed to have lost the train of his thoughts for a while, as his features slowly resumed their previous placidity; but the troubled expression presently returned, and his lips were suddenly compressed and his brow corrugated with anger or indignation.

"Monstrous! *Two thousand pounds!*" He spoke these words in a much stronger voice than those preceding.

"Oh, dear!—I should have thought his lordship had lost much more than *that*," whispered Miss Macspleuchan.

"Insist!—Titmouse—Titmouse!" His lip slightly quivered. "Shocking! What *will* she——" An expression of agony came over his face.

"Poor papa! He's heard it all!" said Lady Cecilia faintly.

"Cecilia!—Cecilia!" continued the Earl, and, suddenly opening his eyes, gazed forward, and then on each side, with a dull confused stare. Then he closed them, muttering, "I certainly thought Mr. Gammon was here!" Shortly afterward he opened them again, and, his head being inclined toward the side where Lady Cecilia was sitting, they fell upon, and seemed to be arrested by her countenance. After gazing at her for some moments with a very, very sorrowful expression, he again closed his eyes, murmuring, "Poor Cecilia!" Nothing could be more soul-touching than

the tone in which the Earl spoke. "Kiss me, Cecilia," said he gently; and raising both his arms a little, while she leaned forward and kissed his forehead, he very feebly placed them round her, but they almost immediately sank on the bed again, as if he had not strength to keep them extended.

"We will live together, Cecilia, again," murmured the Earl.

"Dear papa, don't distress yourself; if you do, I really must go away from you."

His eye remained fixed steadily on that of his daughter.

"Is it not horrible, Cecilia?" said he with a shudder.

"Dear papa, I don't know what you mean," replied Cecilia, quite startled by the tone of his voice and the expression of his eye.

"I thought it would have killed her," he muttered, closing his eyes, while a faint flush came over his face, but that of Lady Cecilia turned deadly pale.

"Don't speak again, dear," whispered Miss Macspleuchan, herself a little startled by the Earl's manner; "he's wandering a little; he'll go to sleep presently."

"Yes, in my grave, madam," replied the Earl gravely, and speaking in a stronger voice than he had yet spoken in, at the same time turning toward Miss Macspleuchan an eye that suddenly blanched her face. She gazed at him in silence and apprehensively.

There ensued a pause of a minute or two.

"O Cecilia!" said the Earl presently, shaking his head and looking at her with the same terrible expression that had so startled her before, "that I had first followed you to your grave!"

"My dear papa, you are only dreaming!"

"No, I am not. Oh! how can *you*, Cecilia, be so calm here, when you know that you have married a——"

Lady Cecilia glanced hurriedly at Miss Macspleuchan, who, having risen a little from her chair, was leaning forward in an agitated manner, and straining her ear to catch every word. "What are you talking about, papa?" gasped Lady Cecilia, while her face became of a deadly whiteness.

"Why, I thought you knew it all," said the Earl, sustained and stimulated by the intensity of his feelings; "that this Titmouse—is—Mr. Gammon has acknowledged all—an infamous impostor—an illegitimate——"

Miss Macspleuchan, with a faint shriek, rang the bell at the bed-head violently; but before she or any one else could reach her, Lady Cecilia fell heavily on the floor. She was instantly carried out insensible; while the Earl was found to be seized with a second fit of apoplexy. Dr. Bailey was quickly in attendance, followed soon after by an eminent accoucheur, whom it had been found necessary to send for, Lady Cecilia's illness having assumed the most alarming character conceivable. When Miss Macspleuchan had in some measure recovered from her distraction, she despatched a servant to implore the instant attendance of the Duke and Duchess of Tantallan, unable to bear the overwhelming horror occasioned to her by the statement of the Earl of Dreddlington.

Both the Duke and Duchess, the nearest relatives of the Earl (the Duke being his brother-in-law), who were then in London, came, within half an hour to Lord Dreddlington's and were made acquainted with the fearful occasion of what had happened. The Duke and Duchess were quite as proud and haughty people as Lord Dreddlington; but the Duke was a *little* the Earl's superior in point of understanding. When first told of the Earl's disclosure, he was told it as if it were an ascertained fact; and his horror knew no bounds. But when he came to inquire into the matter, and found that it rested on no other foundation than the distempered wanderings of a man whose brain was at the time laboring under the effects of an apoplectic seizure, he began to feel a great relief; especially when Miss Macspleuchan could mention no single circumstance corroboratory of so amazing and frightful a representation. At her suggestion, the Duke sent off a special messenger to Mr. Gammon with the following note:

"The Duke of Tantallan presents his compliments to Mr. Gammon, and most earnestly begs that he will, without a moment's delay, favor the Duke with a call in Portman Square, on business of the last importance."

Mr. Gammon hastily opened the letter, and, having glanced at the contents—"Give my compliments to his grace, and say I will attend him immediately," said he. "By the way, do you happen to have been into Grosvenor Square to-day?

—And do you know how the Earl of Dreddlington is?" inquired Gammon anxiously.

"Yes, sir; his lordship and the Lady Cecilia Titmouse are both dangerously ill. I believe his lordship, sir, has had a stroke—they say it's the second he's had to-day—and her ladyship is taken in labor and is in a shocking bad way, sir."

"Dear! I'm sorry to hear it! Thank you," replied Gammon, hastily turning away a face that he felt must have gone of a ghastly paleness.

"It may be only to inquire about the Artificial Rain Company," said Gammon to himself, as he poured himself out a small glass of brandy and drank it off, to overcome a little sense of faintness which he felt coming rapidly over him. "The Duke *is* a shareholder, I think. But I must take a decided course, one way or another. Suppose the Earl has disclosed the affair to Lady Cecilia—and it has got to the Duke's ears? Suppose I were to affect total ignorance of the thing—and swear that it is altogether a delusion on the part of the Earl?—That would be rather a bold stroke, too! —Suppose the Earl to *die* of this bout—ah! then there's an end of the thing, and all's well. A second fit of apoplexy within twelve hours—humph!—If the Earl has mentioned the thing how far has he gone?—Did he name the rent-charge? —Ah!—well, and suppose he did? What's easier than also to deny *that* altogether? But suppose Titmouse should be tampered with, and pressed about the business? Perdition! Then, suppose the Earl to recover; he will never be the same man he was—his mind will go altogether!—But if he recovers a glimmering of sense—egad! 'twill require a little nerve to deny the thing to his face, and swear that the whole thing is a delusion of a brain disordered by previous fright!—And suppose Lady Cecilia dies?—and leaves no issue?—and then Lord Dreddlington follows her—by Heavens, this hideous little devil *becomes Lord Drelincourt at once!!*"

This was the way that Mr. Gammon turned the thing over in his mind as he rapidly walked toward Portman Square; and by the time that he had reached the Duke's house he had finally determined on the course he should pursue; and tho his face was rather pale, he was perfectly self-possessed and firm, at the moment of his being shown into the library,

where the Duke was walking about, impatient for his arrival.

"Gracious God, sir!" commenced the Duke, "what is all this horrible news we hear about Mr. Titmouse?"

"*Horrible* news—about Mr. Titmouse?" echoed Gammon amazedly, "pardon me—I don't understand your grace! If you allude to the two *executions*, which I'm sorry to hear——"

"Pho, sir! you are trifling! Believe me, this is a very awful moment to all persons involved in what has taken place!" replied the Duke, his voice quivering with emotion.

"Your grace, I *really* cannot comprehend you——"

"You soon shall, sir! I tell you, it may be a matter of infinite moment to yourself personally, Mr. Gammon!"

"What *does* your grace mean?"

"Mean, sir? By ——! that you've killed my Lord Dreddlington and the Lady Cecilia," cried the Duke.

"I wait to hear, as soon as your grace may condescend to explain," said Gammon calmly.

"Explain, sir? Why, I have *already* told and explained everything!"

"Your grace has told—has explained nothing whatever."

"I mean, what's this horrible story you've been telling my Lord Dreddlington about Mr. Titmouse being—A BASTARD?" If the Duke had struck at Gammon, the latter could not have started back more suddenly and violently than he did on hearing his grace utter the last word. The spectacle which he presented arrested the Duke's increasing excitement. He stared with amazement. "Why, sir, are we both—are we all—mad? or dreaming? or what has come to us?"

"I think," replied Gammon, a little recovering from the sort of stupor into which the Duke's words had apparently thrown him, "it is I who have a better title than your grace to ask the question!—I tell Lord Dreddlington that Mr. Titmouse is a bastard! Why, I can hardly credit my ears! Does my Lord Dreddlington say that I have told him so?"

"He does, sir!" replied the Duke fiercely.

"And what else may his lordship have said concerning me?" inquired Gammon, with a sort of hopeless smile.

"By Heaven, sir, you mustn't treat this matter lightly!" said the Duke impetuously.

"May I ask your grace whether this is the matter mentioned in your grace's note, as of the——"

"It *is*, sir! it is!—and it's killed my Lord Dreddlington—and also the Lady Cecilia!"

"What!" cried Gammon, starting with increasing amazement, "does *her ladyship*, too, say that I have told her so?"

"Well, sir—certainly the fact is, I may be mistaken as to *that* matter. I was not present; but, at all events, my Lord Dreddlington certainly says you told *him*—and he's told Lady Cecilia—and it's killing her. By Heavens, sir, I expect hourly to hear of both of their deaths! Have you ever made any such statement to my Lord Dreddlington?"

"Not a syllable—never a breath of the sort in my life!" replied Gammon boldly and rather sharply.

"What—nothing of the sort? or to that effect?"

"Certainly—certainly not!—But let me ask, in my turn, is the *fact* so? Does your grace mean to say that——"

"No, sir," interrupted the Duke, but not speaking in his former confident tone, "but my Lord Dreddlington does!"

"Oh, impossible! impossible!" cried Gammon with an incredulous air. "Only consider for one moment—how could the fact possibly be so and I not know it? Why, I know every step of his pedigree!"

"Why, Mr. Gammon, then my Lord Dreddlington must have completely lost his senses! He declares that you told him that such was the fact!—When and where, may I ask, did you first see him to-day?"

"About half-past eleven or twelve o'clock, when he called at my chambers in a state of the greatest agitation and excitement, occasioned by the announcement in this morning's paper of the sudden blow-up of the Artificial——"

"Good Heaven! why, is *that* gone?" interrupted his grace eagerly and alarmedly. "When? why? how?"

"Indeed it is, your grace. My Lord Dreddlington was the first from whom I heard anything on the subject."

"It's very odd I didn't see the paragraph! Where was it? In the *Morning Growl?*"

"It was, your grace—it stated that Sir Sharper Bubble had suddenly absconded, with all the funds of——"

"Oh, the villain! Why do you make such people chairmen

and treasurers and so forth? How must the loss be made good? You really don't look sharp enough after people whom you put into such situations! Who the deuce is this fellow—this Sir Bubble Sharper?"

"He was greatly respected in the City, or he would not have been in the situation he was. Who could have suspected it?"

"And is the thing quite blown up? All gone?"

"Yes, I fear it is, indeed!" replied Gammon.

"Of course no one can be made liable," inquired the Duke very anxiously, "beyond the amount of his shares?"

"I devoutly trust not! Your grace sees it depends a good deal on the prominence which any one takes in the affair."

"Egad! is that the principle? Then, I assure you, Mr. Gammon, I have not, for my part, taken the least public part in the proceedings——"

"I am very happy to hear it, your grace! Nor have I—but I very much fear that my Lord Dreddlington may have gone further a good deal——"

"I've several times warned him on the subject, I assure you! By the way, there's that other affair, Mr. Gammon. I hope—eh?—that the Gunpowder and Freshwater——"

"Good heavens, your grace! I hope all is right *there*—or I, for one, am a ruined man!" replied Gammon quickly.

"I—I—hope so, too, sir. So Lord Dreddlington was a good deal shocked, eh, this morning?"

"Yes, indeed! I was greatly alarmed on his account."

"And is this Mr. Titmouse—eh?—involved in the thing?"

"I really can't tell—his movements are somewhat eccentric. By the way, I recollect now that I *did* mention his name to Lord Dreddlington."

"Ah, indeed? What about?"

"Why, I heard that early this morning there would be one or two executions put into his house—he's been going on lately in a very wild way."

"Was that all that passed between you about him?"

"I will undertake to say," replied Gammon pausing, putting his finger to his lips, and trying to recollect, "that that was the only mention made of his name, for soon after his lordship was seized with a fit." There ensued a pause of a few moments.

"What a singular hallucination his lordship must be labor-

ing under to make such an assertion concerning me as he appears to have made!" presently observed Gammon.

"Very!" replied the Duke earnestly, and added, after one or two other observations, "then I understand you as stating, Mr. Gammon, that there is not the least foundation for the representations which my Lord Dreddlington has made concerning you, with reference to Mr. Titmouse—excuse me, is it so, upon your word of honor?"

"Upon my sacred word of honor!" replied Gammon steadfastly, and, bowing to the Duke, took his leave, promising to call on his grace early on the morrow, and to make every exertion to see Mr. Titmouse—whom Mr. Gammon was now, indeed, devouringly anxious to see. Good heavens—how much depended on Titmouse! on the manner in which he would deal with such questions as would infallibly be asked of him by the Duke, and by any one else who might have heard of the rumor! In short, Gammon was quite distracted by doubts and fears, as he bent his way back to his chambers, not venturing, after what he had heard, to call in Grosvenor Square that evening, lest he should hear fatal news of his *victims!* The next morning the instant that Mr. Gammon laid his hands on the morning paper, he turned with eagerness and trepidation to a particular gloomy corner of it and read as follows:

"Died, yesterday, in her 29th year, after giving premature birth to a son, still-born, Lady Cecilia Titmouse, the lady of Tittlebat Titmouse, Esq., M.P., and only daughter and heiress of the Right Honorable the Earl of Dreddlington." Mr. Gammon laid down the paper, and for some moments felt overcome with a deadly faintness. Having, however, recovered himself a little, on casting a hasty apprehensive glance over the paper for intelligence of the Earl of Dreddlington, he read as follows:

"The Earl of Dreddlington, we regret to say, continues alarmingly ill. Drs. Bailey and Whittington are in constant attendance upon his lordship. Our readers will see, in another part of our paper, the melancholy announcement of the death of his lordship's lovely and accomplished daughter, Lady Cecilia Titmouse, after giving premature birth to a son, still-born. We regret to hear it rumored that the illness of his lordship originated in a shock occasioned by circumstances

of a very painful nature; but this report, we trust, will turn out to be unfounded. In the event of his lordship's demise, he is succeeded in his titles and estates by his son-in-law, and heir, upon the death of the Lady Cecilia, Mr. Titmouse, M.P. for Yatton."

In passing down Park Lane, after the funeral of poor Lady Cecilia, Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey and Kate saw a hatch-

"Upon my sacred word of honor."

ment suspended from the house of Mr. Titmouse; and, some short time afterward, they saw that gentleman himself, in the Park, driving a beautiful dark-blue cab, his tiger and he both in mourning—which became them equally. Black greatly changes most people's appearance; but it effected a peculiar change in Mr. Titmouse; the fact being, however, that, desirous of exhibiting even extra marks of respect for

the memory of the dear deceased Lady Cecilia, he had put his sandy mustaches and imperial into mourning by carefully dressing them with Indian ink, which gave a very touching and pensive character, indeed, to his features!

CHAPTER XXX

REVEALS A CERTAIN PIECE OF NEWS WHICH VARIOUSLY AFFECTS THE SEVERAL FORTUNES OF THE HERO, LORD DREDDLINGTON, THE AUBREYS, AND MR. GAMMON

While Mr. Titmouse's pedigree is being subjected to the gloomy, silent, and mysterious inquisition of the Ecclesiastical Court in the matter of the caveat estopping the administration of Lady Stratton's will, on the ground that Mr. Aubrey is NEARER OF KIN than he, for reasons which will appear later, let us turn for a moment to contemplate a pitiable figure—a victim of the infernal machinations of Mr. Gammon—I mean the poor old Earl of Dreddlington. He was yet—a month after the death of his unhappy daughter, Lady Cecilia—staggering under the awful shock which he had experienced. Before he had been in any degree restored to consciousness, she had been buried for nearly three weeks; and the earliest notification to him of the melancholy occurrence was the deep mourning habiliments of Miss Macspleuchan, who scarcely ever quitted his bedside. When, in a feeble and tremulous voice, he inquired as to the cause of her death, he could get no other account of it—either from Miss Macspleuchan, his physicians, or the Duke of Tantallan—than that it had been occasioned by the shock of suddenly seeing his lordship brought home seriously ill.

When at length he pressed Miss Macspleuchan, upon the matter, and challenged her as to the real cause of what had happened—viz., the blighting discovery of Mr. Titmouse's illegitimacy—she resolutely maintained that he was laboring altogether under a delusion—indeed, a double delusion; first, as to his imaginary conversation with Mr. Gammon, and, secondly, as to his supposed communication of it to Lady Cecilia. As the Duke invariably joined Miss Macspleuchan in scouting the mere mention of the matter as but the figment of a disordered brain, the Earl was at length silenced, if not convinced. He peremptorily prohibited Mr. Titmouse, however,

from entering his house; and there was little difficulty in making that gentleman *appear* satisfied that the sole cause of his exclusion was his cruelty and profligacy toward the late Lady Cecilia—altho, with a sickening inward shudder, he had previously learned the real reason from Mr. Gammon.

Mr. Gammon's first interview with the Earl, after his illness and bereavement, had become a matter of absolute necessity—and was at his lordship's instance, for the Duke of Tantallan had intimated to him that it was indeed indispensable, if only to settle some matters of business of pressing exigency connected with the failure of the Artificial Rain Company. Gammon responded to the Earl's request, which was conveyed to him through the Duke, with reluctance. Not, however, that he really felt any commiseration for his victim, whom he knew to be absolutely ruined: his anxiety was only as to how he should extricate himself from liability in respect of it.

The Earl sat in his library, dressed in deep black, which hung upon his shrunk attenuated figure as upon an old skeleton. He looked twenty years older than he had appeared two short months before. His hair, white as snow, his pallid emaciated cheek, his weak and wandering eye, and a slight tremulous motion about his head and shoulders—all showed the mere wreck of a man that he had become.

"Mr. Gammon, my lord," said the servant in a low tone, after gently opening the door.

"Show him in," said the Duke, rather nervously, adding to the Earl in a hurried whisper, "now be calm—my dear Dreddlington—be calm—it will be over in a few minutes' time." The Earl's lips quivered a little, his thin white hands trembled, and his eyes were directed to the door with a look of the most mournful apprehension, as the fiend entered. Mr. Gammon was pale and evidently nervous and excited; his habitual self-command, however, would have concealed it from any but a practised observer. "It gives me deep concern, my lord," said he in a low tone, advancing with an air of profound deference and sympathy, "to see that you have been so great a sufferer!"

"Will you take a chair, sir?" said the Duke, pointing to one which the servant had brought for him, and in which Gammon sat down, with a courteous inclination toward

the Duke. "You see," said his grace, "that my Lord Dreddlington is but slowly recovering!"

"Is it true, sir?" inquired the Earl, evidently with a desperate effort.

Gammon answered calmly: "Alas!—your lordship of course alludes to that unhappy company——"

"*Is it true, sir?*" repeated the Earl, altogether disregarding Gammon's attempt at evasion.

"You cannot but be aware, Mr. Gammon, of the subject to which my Lord Dreddlington is alluding," said the Duke.

"Oh!" exclaimed Gammon with a slight shrug of his shoulders and a sigh, "I understand that your lordship is alluding to some conversation which you suppose has passed between us concerning Mr. Titmouse."

"Sir—sir—yes! yes!" gasped the Earl.

"Well, my lord, I have heard that you suppose I told your lordship that he was *illegitimate*."

"Ay," said the Earl with tremulous eagerness.

"O my lord, you are really laboring under as complete a delusion as ever," commenced Gammon.

"Sir—Mr. Gammon—do you believe that there is NO GOD? —that HE does not know the—the——" interrupted the Earl, but ceased, apparently overpowered by his emotions. Gammon looked in appealing silence at the Duke.

"What makes you imagine, sir, that I am bereft of reason and memory?" presently inquired the Earl, with a strength of voice and manner which alarmed Gammon.

"I cannot account, my lord, for the extraordinary hallucination which seems——"

"And I suppose, sir, I am also in a delusion concerning the rent-charge for two thousand a year, which you have got on the Yatton pro——"

"Oh, pardon—pardon me, my lord! All pure—absolute delusion!" interrupted Gammon, with a confident smile, a look and a tone of voice that would have staggered the most incredulous.

The Earl raised his thin, white, trembling hand and pressed it against his forehead for a moment; and then said, turning to the Duke, "He would deny that he is now in our presence!"

"My dear Dreddlington—don't, for God's sake, excite your-

self," said the Duke anxiously, adding, after a pause, "I am as persuaded, as I am of my existence, that you're under a complete delusion! Recollect your serious illness—every one is subject to delusions of some sort or other when he's been so ill as you have!"

"O Tantallan! Tantallan!" replied the Earl, mournfully shaking his head, "I take God to witness how this man is lying!" The Duke glanced hastily at Gammon as these

"Sir – Mr. Gammon – do you believe there is no God?"

words were uttered, and observed that he had gone suddenly pale and was in the act of rising from his chair.

"Pray, Mr. Gammon——" commenced the Duke imploringly.

"I can make very great allowance, I assure your grace, for his lordship's situation—but there are bounds which I will allow no man living to overstep with impunity," said Gammon calmly but resolutely—overjoyed at obtaining such a pretext for terminating the interview; "and unless his lord-

ship chooses instantly to retract what he has said, and apologize for it, I will never enter his presence again!"

"Oh—he had better go!" said the Earl feebly, averting his face from Gammon with horror.

"Mr. Gammon, *pray* resume your seat," said the Duke significantly. "I will undertake to warrant you in regarding the words as not having been spoken."

"I thank your grace," replied Gammon determinately, "I require an explicit retraction. I entertain a deep deference toward your grace, but am also aware of what is due to myself. My lord," he added, as if at a sudden impulse, addressing the Earl, "do permit me to request your lordship to withdraw and apologize for——" But the Earl turned his face aside, and, extending his hand toward Gammon, feebly motioning him away; on which, with a low bow to the Duke of Tantallan, Gammon took his hat and moved toward the door.

"Sir—Mr. Gammon—you must not go," said the Duke earnestly; "you are here on business of pressing importance —all *this* must pass away and be forgotten."

"Your grace, I shall be most happy to attend at any time and anywhere; but this room I quit instantly."

"Then, sir, have the goodness to walk into the next room," said the Duke somewhat imperiously, "and I will come to you presently." Mr. Gammon bowed and withdrew.

"O God! how atrocious is the conduct of that man!" said the Earl, when they were left alone.

"Really, Dreddlington, you must get rid of these—these—absurd notions."

"Let me never see his face again!" replied the Earl feebly. "I have but a short time to live, and that time the sight of *him*, I feel, makes still shorter."

"Come, come—now he's here, and on a very important errand—let us have done with him—let us have him back, and I'll tell him you withdraw——"

"Withdraw? He *is* withdrawn," said the Earl confusedly.

"What d'ye mean, my dear Dreddlington? I say—let me tell him——"

"I mean, it was at his chambers, in Holborn—I pledge my honor, I recollect as if it were yester——"

"Pho, pho!" cried the Duke, rather impatiently, "it must

be done! He's come on matters of the very last importance —the thing's been put off to the very latest moment on your account—that cursed company!" The Earl looked up at his companion, and a faint smile flitted over his wasted features.

"Ah—I'm now satisfied," said he, shaking his head, "that they must dig a very great depth, indeed, before they come to the copper." The Duke looked puzzled, but said hastily. "That's right!—I'll have him back, and you'll allow me to say it's all a mistake?"

"Certainly—I am satisfied of it."

"That will do, my dear Dreddlington!—That's the way such nonsense should be put an end to," said the Duke, and, ringing the bell, ordered the servant, to request Mr. Gammon to return. After a brief interval, that gentleman re-entered the library, but with some sternness and reluctance of manner.

"Mr. Gammon," replied the Duke a little quickly, "my Lord Dreddlington owns he was mistaken—he, of course, withdraws the expression—so we had better at once to business——"

"Aye—certainly! certainly! Have you the papers with you, Mr. Gammon?" inquired the Earl, while his trembling fingers held his gold spectacles. Mr. Gammon bowed rather haughtily, and, resuming the chair he had quitted, drew it to the table, and opened a little packet of papers.

"It was a ridiculous affair, I am afraid, sir," said the Earl, addressing Mr. Gammon, who felt a little surprised at the altered look and tone of the Earl.

"I fear it was extremely *unfortunate*, my lord, in its issue," he replied gravely, arranging the papers.

"Just show us, Mr. Gammon, if you please, the diagrams and sections of the strata——"

"The *what?*" inquired the Duke, turning surprisedly to the Earl—so did Mr. Gammon, and for a moment ceased arranging his papers. Both the Duke and he turned pale and gazed in silent dismay at their companion. Gammon felt momentarily sick at heart. It was evident that Lord Dreddlington's mind had gently given way. There was a smile of indescribable weakness flickering about the mouth; the eyes were unsteady; all sternness had vanished from his

brow; and his manner was calm, with even an approach toward cheerfulness. Gammon glanced with horror at the Duke, who, without removing his eyes from Lord Dreddlington, unconsciously exclaimed, "O my God!"

"It is your lordship's pleasure——" faltered Gammon, his hands trembling visibly.

"You are right, Tantallan," said Lord Dreddlington, as if suddenly struck by the peculiar look with which the Duke continued to regard him. "You shall hear all; but we must be alone. Sir, you may retire, and be in attendance another day," he added, abruptly addressing Gammon with all his former stateliness of manner, but with feeble voice. Mr. Gammon, very greatly agitated, hastily put together the documents he had partially arranged on the table, and with a profound bow withdrew.

"At nine this evening—in Portman Square, sir, if you please," said the Duke in an agitated manner.

"I will attend your grace," said Gammon, and with not a little trepidation closed the door after him.

Mr. Gammon, on quitting Lord Dreddlington's house, quickly recovered from the momentary shock which he had suffered in the Earl's presence; and all other feelings were merged in one of delight and exultation at the awful calamity which had befallen Lord Dreddlington. No one, Mr. Gammon considered, would thenceforth think of attaching the least importance to anything the Earl might say or had said, which would doubtless be deemed the mere creation of a disordered brain. Then all that would be necessary would be the silencing of Titmouse—no difficult matter, since even he could comprehend that secrecy was to him a matter of salvation or destruction. But then, again, like a criminal's chance glance at the hideous guillotine or gallows in the distance, a recollection of the Ecclesiastical inquiry, at that instant in vigorous action, blanched the cheek of Mr. Gammon and dashed all his new hopes to the ground.

If those infernal inquisitors *should* discover all, and thereby demonstrate Titmouse's illegitimacy, how perfectly frightful would be the position of Mr. Gammon? What would then avail him the insanity of Lord Dreddlington? Would it not, on the contrary, be attributed to the right cause—the atrocious cruelty and villainy which had been practised upon

him? How irretrievably was Gammon committed by his repeated and solemn asseverations to Miss Macspleuchan and the Earl of Dreddlington? The evidence which sufficed to entitle Mr. Aubrey to administer to Lady Stratton would also suffice to entitle him to an immediate restoration to the Yatton property! And would the matter rest there? No.

Steps would inevitably be taken, in such an event, to fix him—Gammon—as a partner, or a prime mover, in the fraud and conspiracy by which alone, it would then be alleged, Titmouse had been enabled to recover the property.

Gammon felt himself the most miserable of mankind. All other anxieties were, however, at present absorbed in one—that concerning the issue of the inquiry then pending. If the

issue of that inquiry should be adverse—he had absolutely nothing for it but instant flight from universal scorn and execration. Of what avail would then have been all his prodigious anxieties, sacrifices, and exertions, his deep-laid and complicated plans and purposes? He would have irretrievably damned himself for what? To allow the wretch Titmouse to revel, for a season, in unbounded luxury and profligacy! What single personal advantage had Mr. Gammon hitherto obtained for himself, taxed to their utmost as had been his powerful energies for the past three years? First of all, as to Miss Aubrey, the lovely object of his intense desires—what advance had he made toward the accomplishment of his object after all his profound and cruel treachery against her brother? Not a hair's breadth. Nay, on the contrary, the slight footing of intimacy which he had contrived, in the first instance, to secure, he had now lost forever. Could they have failed to perceive, in spite of all his devices, his hand in the recent persecution of Mr. Aubrey? The stern deportment of Mr. Runnington, who had expressly prohibited, on the part of Mr. Aubrey, all communication with that gentleman on the part of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, except through himself, spoke volumes.

Moreover, Mr. Gammon had chanced to be prowling about Vivian Street on the very evening on which Lord De la Zouch made an unexpected appearance with Mr. Aubrey; and Gammon had seen Mr. Aubrey, Mrs. Aubrey, and Miss Aubrey, followed by his lordship, enter his carriage, in dinner-costume; and he thought with a violent pang of one Mr. Delamere! He had also ascertained how suddenly his lordship had come over from Paris—just at that crisis in the circumstances of the Aubreys; and how probable was it that his lordship's potent interference had originated the formidable proceedings of the Ecclesiastical Court? And suppose the result of these proceedings should be to detect the imposition by means of which Titmouse had been enabled to oust Mr. Aubrey from Yatton—what must *she*—what must they all—think of Mr. Gammon? Inevitably, that he had either originally contrived or was now conniving at the imposture! And what if she really were now all the while engaged to the future Lord De la Zouch?—and if the present Lord De la Zouch, with his immense revenues, were resolved to bear

Mr. Aubrey through all his difficulties and troubles with a high hand?

Look again at the financial difficulties which were thickening around him. Between sixty and seventy thousand pounds had been already raised on mortgage of the Yatton estates! —and not a shilling more could now be raised without additional and collateral security, which Gammon could not procure. Then there was the interest payable half-yearly on these mortgages, which alone swallowed up some £3,500 annually. In addition to this, Titmouse was over head and ears in debt; and he must be supported all the while in a manner suitable to his station; and an establishment must be kept up at Yatton. How, with all this, was Mr. Gammon's own dearly bought rent-charge to be realized? The already overburdened property was totally unequal to bear this additional pressure.

Mr. Gammon, moreover, had been unfortunate in some gambling speculations in the funds, by which means the money he had so quickly made had been as quickly lost. It was true there were the probable proceeds of the two promissory notes now put in suit against Mr. Aubrey, and also the bond of Lord De la Zouch himself, in all amounting to twenty thousand pounds, with interest; but months must necessarily elapse before, even in the ordinary course, the actions for the recovery of these sums could be brought to a successful issue—to say nothing of any disastrous occurrence which Gammon could just conceive the possibility of, and which might have the effect of fatally impugning the right of action of Mr. Titmouse. Gammon had repeatedly turned in his mind the propriety of raising money by assignment of the bond of Lord De la Zouch, but for several reasons had deemed it inexpedient to venture upon such a step. For instance, the bond would be due within a month or two; and who would advance any serious sum on so large a security, without rigorous inquiries into the validity of the bond in point of exaction, and the right of the obligee to put it in suit? Supposing the issue of the Ecclesiastical inquiry to be adverse, and Titmouse's title to the Yatton property to be destroyed, would not that at once invalidate his claims upon the bond and also upon the two promissory notes?

Success or failure in the Ecclesiastical suit was now in

fact the pivot upon which everything turned with Mr. Gammon—it would be either his salvation or his destruction; and the thought of it kept him in a state of feverish trepidation and excitement from morning to night, rendering him almost wholly incapable of attending to his professional business. He had gone down several times, to ascertain, as far as was practicable, the course which things were taking. Mr. Quod, who had the matter in charge for him, was very sanguine, indeed, as to the issue; but, alas! Gammon had not ventured to tell him the true state of the case; so that Quod naturally confined himself to the substantiating of Mr. Titmouse's pedigree as it had been propounded, and with success, at the trial of ejectment. Mr. Gammon trembled at the systematic and vigorous prosecution of the cause on the part of Mr. Aubrey; what might it not elicit? Regardless of the consequences, he had several times tried to ascertain, from those who had been examined, the course of inquiry which had been pursued, and the evidence which had been obtained from them—but in vain; some of the witnesses were in a station of society which repelled his advances; and others were effectually deterred from communicativeness by the injunctions of the commissioner. Thus Mr. Gammon could ascertain nothing—and was left to await, in fearful suspense, the legitimate issue of this tantalizing and mysterious process, till the day when "publication" should "pass," and both parties should be put in possession of all the evidence which had been obtained.

'Twas about eight o'clock in the evening, toward the close of October, and Mr. Gammon was walking to and fro about his room, which was cheerful with the light of a lamp and the warmth of a fire. He himself, however, was very far from cheerful—he was in a state of exquisite anxiety and suspense; and well he might be, for he was in momentary expectation of receiving a copy of the evidence which had been taken on the part of Mr. Aubrey, in the Ecclesiastical suit, publication having passed the day before. He muttered blighting curses at the intolerable delay of old Mr. Quod, who, Mr. Gammon was assured, might have procured a copy of the evidence several hours before, with only moderate exertion. Twice had Mr. Gammon's messenger been despatched in vain; and he was now absent on the third errand to Mr. Quod's

chambers. At length Mr. Gammon heard a heavy footstep ascending the stairs—he knew it, and, darting to the door, opened it just as his messenger had reached the landing with a bulky white packet under his arm, sealed and tied with red tape.

"Ah!—that will do. Thank you, thank you!—call to-morrow morning," said Gammon hastily, almost snatching the packet out of the man's hand.

"Mrs. Brown—don't let me be disturbed to-night by any one—on any consideration," said he to his laundress; and having ordered her to close the outer door, he reentered his sitting-room, and with a beating heart burst open the seals, tape, and cartridge-paper, and fastened in an instant with devouring eyes upon the pregnant enclosure. Over page after page his eye glanced with lightning speed, his breathing unconsciously accelerated the while. When he had got to about the middle of it, his breath was for a minute or so suspended, while his affrighted eye traveled down a couple of pages, which told him all—all he had feared to see, and more—more than he had known himself. "Ah, perdition—the game is up!" he faintly exclaimed, and, rising from his chair, threw himself down upon the sofa, in a state of dismay and bewilderment which no words of mine are powerful enough to describe.

Quite as much anxiety had been felt on the same subject in a different quarter, during the whole of the day—at the Priory, the home of Lord De la Zouch, who had insisted upon taking the whole family of Aubreys down there for rest and recuperation after the terrible experiences they had gone through in the City. Mr. Runnington had written to assure Mr. Aubrey that the first moment of his being able to procure a copy of the evidence, he would come down post with it. As, however, nine o'clock elapsed without his having made his appearance, Mr. Delamere, without announcing his intention, slipped out and ordered his groom to have his horses in readiness instantly. Within a quarter of an hour's time he was on his way to Town, having left a hasty verbal message acquainting Lord and Lady De la Zouch of the object of his sudden move. When he reached Mr. Runnington's offices he found no one there, to his infinite disappointment. Having slept in Dover Street, he reappeared at Mr. Running-

ton's about ten o'clock the next morning, and found a chaise and four at the door, into which Mr. Runnington, with a large packet under his arm, was in the very act of entering, to drive down to Priory.

"How is it—for God's sake?" said Mr. Delamere, rushing forward to Mr. Runnington, who was sufficiently surprised at seeing him.

"Oh, thank God! The battle's ours!" replied Mr. Runnington with delighted excitement. "The murder's out!—I'll pledge my existence that within six months' time we have them all back at Yatton!"

"You're *off*, are not you?" inquired Delamere, as excited as himself.

"To be sure—won't you come with me?" replied Mr. Runnington.

"Rattle away, my lads!" cried out Delamere to the post-boys, and the next moment they were on their way, and at indeed a rattling pace. In somewhere about an hour and a quarter's time, the reeking horses and dusty chaise dashed up to the hall door of the Priory; and as Delamere caught one or two figures standing at the windows, he waved his hand in triumph through the chaise window. That brought Lord and Lady De la Zouch and Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey breathless to the door—out jumped Delamere, without waiting for the steps to be let down, and, grasping the hands of all four, exclaimed with enthusiasm, "Victory!—Victory!—but where is she——"

"Somewhere in the grounds, sir," replied a servant.

"Mr. Runnington will tell you all," said Delamere, and, springing off the step, was out of sight in a twinkling, in quest of Miss Aubrey, burning to be the first with the joyful news. He soon caught sight of her graceful figure—she was standing with her back toward him, apparently in a musing posture, gazing at the bubbling rivulet. Hearing his bounding steps, she turned round, and started at seeing him.

"O Miss Aubrey—Kate, Kate!" he stammered breathlessly, "by Heavens, we've won!" Miss Aubrey turned very pale.

"O Mr. Delamere—you cannot be—I *hope* you are not mistaken——" said she faintly.

"On my sacred word of honor, I have seen—I have read it all myself! 'Tis as sure as that the sun is shining. 'Tis all

up with the villains!" Miss Aubrey made him no answer; her cheek continued white as that of a statue, and it was absolutely necessary that he should put his arm round her —if he had not, she would have fallen.

"Come!—Come! My sweet, my lovely Kate! Rouse yourself!" cried he, with fond anxiety, and pressed his lips gently on her forehead—a liberty of which she was probably not conscious, for she made no show of resistance. Presently she heaved a deep sigh, her eyes opened, and, finding herself entirely in his embrace, she made a slight effort to disengage herself, but in vain. He was supporting her on one knee—for there was no bench or seat within view. She burst into tears, and they soon relieved her pent-up bosom of its excitement.

"Dearest Kate—it's glorious news, and I have been too hasty with it!"

"No—no—Mr. Delamere! I am only overpowered with joy and with gratitude! O Mr. Delamere, I could sink out of your sight!"

"Pho! my own angel!—Don't make me miserable by talking in that strain!"

"Well, what *shall* I say?" cried she passionately, turning her face from him.

"*Say*, Kate? That you will let me love you, and you will love me in return! Come, my own Kate! Heaven smiles on you—smile you on *me!*" She spoke not, her face still averted from him.

"I know you won't say me nay, Kate, if it's only for the *news* I've brought you express," said Delamere ardently, and imprinted a passionate kiss on her unresisting lips.

"My sweet Kate! how I have thought of you in every part of the world in which I have been," commenced Delamere, after having a second and a third and a fourth time imprinted his lips upon those of his beautiful and blushing mistress—and Heaven only knows what other absurdities he might have been guilty of, when, to Kate's inconceivable embarrassment, behold a sudden turn brought them full in view of Lord and Lady De la Zouch and Mr. Runnington.

"My dear Miss Aubrey," cried Lord De la Zouch, "we have come to congratulate you on this great event!" and he grasped her affectionately by the hands, and then Lady

It was absolutely necessary that he should put his arm round her.

De la Zouch embraced her future daughter-in-law, whose cheeks burned like fire, while those of Mr. Delamere tingled a little.

"Upon my honor, sir, you seem to have been making hay while the sun shines," said his lordship in a low tone and laughing, having left Miss Aubrey and Lady De la Zouch together for a few moments.

"Dearest Lady De la Zouch, how did my brother bear it?" inquired Miss Aubrey.

"He bore it with calmness, tho he turned very pale; but poor Mrs. Aubrey was very painfully excited—it was really a most affecting scene. But she is much better now—shall we return to the house?—By the way," added she slyly, "now you're *come into your fortune*, as the saying is, Kate—I—I suppose Geoffry has been talking nonsense to you!" Poor Kate blushed deeply and burst into tears.

CHAPTER XXXI

WHEREIN MR. GAMMON MAKES HIS FINAL EXIT, THE HERO GETS HIS DESERTS, AND FORTUNE ONCE MORE SMILES UPON THE MOST DESERVING

THE reader may possibly bear in mind that Mr. Titmouse had established his right to succeed to the Yatton property, then enjoyed by Mr. Aubrey, by making out to the satisfaction of the jury that he was descended from an elder branch of the Aubrey family; that there had existed an unsuspected female descendant of Stephen Dreddlington, the elder brother of Geoffry Dreddlington through whom Mr. Aubrey derived his claim to the succession; and that this obscure female descendant had left issue equally obscure and unsuspected—viz., Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse—to whom *our* friend Titmouse was shown to be heir at law. In fact, it had been made out in open court: *First*, that the aforesaid Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse was the direct descendant, through the female line, of Stephen Dreddlington; *secondly*, had been shown the marriage of Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse; *thirdly*, the birth of Tittlebat Titmouse, the first and indeed the only issue of that marriage. All these were unquestionable facts, and the verdict went accordingly.

But as soon as, according to a happy and invaluable suggestion of the Attorney-General, a rigid inquiry had been instituted on the spot whence the oral and documentary evidence had been obtained by Mr. Gammon—the acute and indefatigable inquisitors succeeded in making the following remarkable discovery. It was found that the two old witnesses who had been called to prove that part of the case on the trial, had since died—one of them very recently. But in pushing their inquiries, one or two other old witnesses were met with who had not been called by Mr. Gammon, even if he had been aware of their existence; and one of these, an old man, while being closely interrogated upon another matter, happened to let fall some expressions which startled

the person making minutes of the evidence; for he spoke of Mr. Titmouse's mother under three different names, *Gubbins*, *Oakley*, and *Johnson*.

Now the proof of the trial had been simply the marriage of Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse, by banns, to Janet Johnson, *spinster*. Either, then, both the witnesses must be mistaken as to her having had other names, or there must be some strange mystery at the bottom of it—and so it at length turned out. This woman's maiden name had been Gubbins; then she had married a rope-maker, of the name of Oakley, in Staffordshire, but had separated from him, after two or three quarrelsome years, and gone into Yorkshire, where she had resided for some time with an aunt. Afterward, she had become acquainted with Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse; and, to conceal the fact of her previous marriage—her husband being alive at the time—she was married to Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse under the name of "Johnson." Two years afterward, this exemplary female died, leaving an only child, Tittlebat Titmouse. Shortly afterward, his father came up to London, bringing with him his little son, and some five years afterward died, leaving one or two hundred pounds behind him for the bringing up of Tittlebat decently—a duty undertaken by a distant relative of his father, and who had been dead some years. Of course Titmouse, at the time when he was first presented to the reader, knew no more than the dead, of his being in any way connected with the distinguished family of the Aubreys in Yorkshire; nor of the very unpleasant circumstances attending his mother's marriage, with which the reader has just been made acquainted.

Nothing can be easier than to conceive how Mr. Gammon might have been able, even if acquainted with the true state of the facts, to produce an impregnable case in court by calling, with judgment, only that evidence which was requisite to show the marriage of Titmouse's father with Janet Johnson—viz., an examined copy of an entry in the parish register of Grilston; of the fact of the marriage under the names specified; and some other slight evidence of the identity of the parties. How was the Attorney-General or any one advising him to have got at the mystery attending the name of "Johnson," in the absence of suspicion pointed precisely at that circumstance? The defendant in an action of

ejectment is necessarily in a great measure in the dark as to the evidence which will be adduced against him, and must fight the evidence as it is presented to him in court; and the plaintiff's attorney is generally better advised than to bring into court witnesses who may be able, if pressed, to disclose more than is necessary or desirable.

The way in which Mr. Gammon became acquainted with the true state of the case was singular. While engaged in obtaining and arranging the evidence in support of the plaintiff's case, under the guidance of Mr. Lynx's opinion, Mr. Gammon stumbled upon a witness who dropped one or two expressions, which suddenly reminded him of two little documents which had been some time before put into his possession, without his having then attached the least importance to them. He was so disturbed at the coincidence that he returned to Town that very night to inspect the papers in question.

They consisted of, first, a letter from one James Oakley to his wife, informing her that he was dying, and that, having heard she was living with another man, he exhorted her to leave her wicked courses before she died; secondly, a letter from one Gabriel Tittlebat Titmouse to his wife, reproaching her with drunkenness and loose conduct, and saying that she knew as well as he did that he could transport her any day he liked; therefore, she had better mind what she was about. This letter was written in the county jail, whither he had been sent for some offense against the game-laws.

These were the two documents which Mr. Titmouse had destroyed, on Gammon's having entrusted them for a moment into his hands. They were infinitely too dangerous documents to admit of his taking the opinion of counsel upon; he therefore kept them entirely to himself, as also the discovery to which they led, not trusting his secret even to either of his partners. Before the case had come into court, Mr. Gammon had been in possession of the facts now laid for the first time before the reader—contemplating, from the first, the use to be thereafter made of the prodigious power he should have become possessed of, in aid of his own personal advancement. Thus was Titmouse base-born indeed—in fact, doubly illegitimate; for, first, his mother had been guilty of bigamy in marrying his father; and, secondly, even

had that not been so, her marrying under a false name had been sufficient to make the marriage utterly void, and equally, of course, to bastardize her issue.

Such, then, was the damning discovery effected by the Ecclesiastical Commission, and which would by and by blazon to the whole world the astounding fact that this doubly base-born little wretch had been enabled, by the profound machinations of Mr. Gammon, not only to deprive Mr. Aubrey of the Yatton estates, but also to intermarry with the Lady Cecilia, the last of the direct line of the noble Dreddlingtons and Drelincourts—to defile the blood and blight the honor of, perhaps, the oldest and the proudest of the nobility of England.

Upon Mr. Gammon it lit like a thunderbolt. For many hours he seemed to have been utterly crushed and blasted by it. His faculties appeared paralyzed. He was totally incapable of realizing his position—of contemplating the prodigious and appalling consequences which must inevitably and almost immediately ensue. He lay upon the sofa the whole night without closing his eyes or having moved a muscle since he had thrown himself down upon it. His laundress came in with his bed-candle, trimmed the lamp, stirred the fire, and withdrew, supposing him asleep. The fire went out—then the lamp—and when, about eight o'clock the next morning, his laundress reappeared, he still lay on the sofa; and a glimpse of his pale and haggard face alarmed her greatly, and she went for a medical man before he was aware of her having done so. On her returning and informing him of what she had done, it roused him from his lethargy, and, rising from the sofa, he desired her to go back and request the medical man not to come, as it was unnecessary. Heaving profound sighs, he proceeded to his dressing-room, got through his toilet, and then sat down to the breakfast table, and for the first time made a very powerful effort to address his mind to the awful nature of the emergency into which he was driven. Mr. Quod soon after made his appearance.

"This is a *very—very—ugly business*, Mr. Gammon!" quoth he, with a gloomy countenance, as he sat down; "I look upon it there's an end to the suit—eh?"

"It is not likely that we shall stir further, certainly,"

replied Mr. Gammon, with a desperate effort to speak calmly; then there was a pause.

"And I should think the matter can't end *here*," presently added Mr. Quod. "With such evidence as this, of course they'll attack Yatton!"

"Then I am prepared to resist them," said Gammon, convinced in his own mind that the sole object of Mr. Quod's visit was to see after the payment of his bill—a reasonable anxiety, surely, considering the untoward issue of the proceedings.

"How could all this have escaped *me*, in getting up the case for the trial?" said Gammon after a pause, darting an anxious and furtive glance at his companion.

"Aye—I hope this will teach you common-law fellows that there's a trick or two worth knowing at Doctor's Commons!" replied Quod. "D'ye remember what I told you at starting? —How was it, d'ye say, *you* couldn't find it out? No one could, till we did!—But, by the way, do we fight any more in the cause? Because we must decide at once—it's no use, I should say, going to the expense of a hearing——"

"I will give you an answer in the course of the day, Mr. Quod," replied Gammon with an air of repressed fury, and succeeded in getting rid of his visitor for the present, and then reperused the whole of the evidence, and considered within himself, as well as he was able, what course he ought to pursue. He had need, truly, to do so, for he very shortly found that he had to deal with an enemy in Mr. Runnington uncompromising and unrelenting—whose movements were equally prompt, vigorous, and skilful. That gentleman, following up his blow—first of all gave notice, through Mr. Pounce, of his intention to proceed with the suit for administration, but found that the enemy in that quarter had struck—Mr. Quod formally notified his abandonment of opposition on the part of Mr. Titmouse. So far, so good. Mr. Runnington's next step was to go down into Staffordshire and Yorkshire, in order to ascertain still more distinctly and conclusively the nature of the evidence which was in existence impeaching the legitimacy of Mr. Titmouse.

His inquiries were so satisfactory that, within a week of his return to Town, he had caused an action of ejectment to be brought for the recovery of the whole of the Yatton

property, and copies of the "Declaration" to be served on Mr. Titmouse and on every tenant in possession upon the estate. Then he served notices on them calling upon each and every one of them not to pay rent in future to any one except Charles Aubrey, Esquire, or his agents by him lawfully appointed; and caused a formal demand of the title-deeds of the estate to be forthwith served upon Mr. Titmouse and Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, and also advertisements to be inserted in the newspapers to caution persons against advancing money on mortgage or on other security of the Yatton property.

These advertisements, and certain paragraphs relating to the same matter, which found their way into the newspapers, to the consternation of Gammon, came under the eye of the Duke of Tantallan, and struck him dumb with dismay and horror at so decisive and public a corroboration of his worst fears. A similar effect they produced upon Miss Macspleuchan, who, however, succeeded in keeping them for some time from the observation of the unfortunate Earl of Dreddlington. But there were certain other persons in whom these announcements excited an amazing degree of excitement and agitation; viz., three Jewish gentlemen—Mordecai Gripe, Mephibosheth Maharshalal-hash-baz, and Israel Fang—who were at present the depositaries of Mr. Titmouse's title-deeds, with a lien upon them, as they fondly imagined, to the extent of nearly seventy thousand pounds, that being the amount of money they had advanced, in hard cash, to Mr. Titmouse, upon mortgage of his Yatton estates. The last of these unfortunate gentlemen—old Mr. Fang—had advanced no less a sum than twenty thousand pounds. He had been the first applied to, and had most fortunately taken a collateral security for the whole sum advanced; viz., a bond—the bond of our old friend, "Thomas Tag-rag, draper and mercer, of No. 375 Oxford Street, and Satin Lodge, Clapham, in the county of Surrey." As soon as ever the dismayed Israelite, by his attorney, had ascertained, by inquiry at the office of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap—where all was confusion—that there really was a claim set up to the whole of the estates, on behalf of him who had been so recently and suddenly dispossessed of them, he exclaimed in an ecstasy: "Oh, ma Got! oh, ma *dear* Got! Shoo Tag-rag!

Shoo on the bond! Looshe no time"—and he was obeyed.

Terrible to tell, two big bailiffs the next day walked straight into the shop of Mr. Tag-rag, who was sitting in his little closet at the further end, with his pen in his hand, busily checking some bills just made out, and without the least ceremony or hesitation hauled him off, hardly giving him time to put his hat on, but gruffly uttering in his ear some such astounding words as "Thirty thousand pounds!" He resisted desperately, shouting out for help, on which all the young men jumped over the counters and seemed to be coming to the rescue; while one or two female customers rushed affrighted out of the shop. In short, there was a perfect panic in the place; tho the young men merely crowded round and clamored loudly, without venturing upon a conflict with the two burly myrmidons of the law, who clapped their prize into a coach that was standing opposite—Mr. Tag-rag frothing at the mouth, and with impassioned gesticulation, protesting that he would have them both transported to Botany Bay on the morrow. They laughed at him good-humoredly and in due time deposited him safely in the lock-up of Mr. Vice.

There he continued for a long while in a state bordering on frenzy. Indeed, he must have fancied that the devil had made it, just then, his particular business to worry and ruin *him;* for what do you think had happened to him only two days before—an event which had convulsed Clapham to its center?—In plain English the Reverend Dismal Horror had eloped with Tabitha Tag-rag—to the infinite scandal and disgust of his congregation, who forthwith met and deposed him from his pulpit; after which his father-in-law solemnly made his will, bequeathing everything he had to a newly established Dissenters' college; and the next day—being just about the time that the grim priest of Gretna was forging the bonds of Hymen for the happy and lovely couple before him, Mr. Tag-rag was hauled off in the way that I have mentioned—which two occurrences would have the effect of enabling Mr. Dismal Horror to prove the disinterestedness of his attachment—an opportunity for which he vowed that he panted—inasmuch as he and she had become, indeed, all the world to each other.

He must now go into some other line of business, in order

to support his fond and lovely wife; and, as for Tag-rag, his pious purposes were frustrated altogether. There was no impeaching the validity of the bond held by the infuriate and inexorable Jew who had arrested him, and who clearly had been no party to any fraud by which—if any—the signature of Mr. Tag-rag had been procured to the bond. Mr. Tag-rag's attorney, Mr. Snout, instantly called upon Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap, to inquire into the particulars of the astounding transaction by which his client had been drawn into so ruinous a liability—but was very cavalierly treated; for he was informed that Mr. Tag-rag must, in their opinion, have lost his senses—at all events his memory; for that he had most deliberately executed the bond, after its nature had been fully explained to him by Mr. Gammon—and his signature was witnessed and attested in the usual way by a clerk in the office, and also in the presence of all the three partners. On hearing all this Mr. Snout hurried back to his frenzied client, and endeavored, for a long while, to reason with him, explaining to him the glaring improbability of his version of the affair. This led to high words, indeed, between them, and at length Mr. Tag-rag spit in his face; and Mr. Snout, being a very little man, and unable to resent the insult effectually, instantly quitted the room, expressing his firm belief that Mr. Tag-rag was a swindler, and he would be no more concerned for a person of that description.

Mr. Tag-rag could not get bail for so frightful an amount; so he committed an act of bankruptcy, by remaining in prison for three weeks. Down, then, came all his creditors upon him in a heap, especially the Jew; a rattling bankruptcy ensued—the upshot of the whole being—to anticipate a little—that a first and final dividend was declared of three farthings in the pound—for it turned out that he had been *speculating* a great deal more than any one had had the least idea of.

After anxious reflection, Mr. Gammon did not absolutely despair of extricating himself from the perils with which he was personally environed. The mere presence of difficulty strung his nerves to encounter it. He resolved to rely on the impossibility of fixing him directly with a knowledge of the rottenness of Titmouse's pretensions—at all events till a

period considerably subsequent to the trial, and Titmouse's marriage with the Lady Cecilia. It occurred to him as calculated, moreover, to aid his contemplated movements, if he could find a fair pretext for throwing overboard his partners, especially Mr. Quirk—for he was satisfied that his own uniform caution had prevented him from committing himself to them, or at least had deprived them of means of proving it. He very soon met with an opportunity, of which he promptly availed himself.

Some week or ten days after the commencement of the term, Mr. Quirk, who was walking down Parliament Street, on his way to the Court of King's Bench, caught sight of a person, a few steps in advance of him, whom he fancied he had seen before. In a few minutes' time, the old gentleman was covered with a cold perspiration; for in a young man, about thirty years old, decently dressed—thin, sallow, and wearing a very depressed air—Mr. Quirk recognized Mr. STEGGARS—a gentleman whom he had imagined to be at that moment comfortably settled at Botany Bay!

This was the individual whose execrable breach of trust had led to Mr. Quirk's discovery of the infirmity in Mr. Aubrey's title. The fact was that Mr. Steggars had quitted England horribly disgusted with Mr. Quirk's conduct, and had also subsequently experienced some little remorse on account of his own mean and cruel conduct toward a gentleman who had never given him the slightest pretext for hostility or revenge. He had contrived to make his feelings upon the subject known to an official at Botany Bay, who had given him an opportunity of explaining matters fully to the authorities at home—the principal of whom, the Home Secretary, had been, and indeed continued to be, a warm personal friend of Mr. Aubrey's. This Minister caused inquiries to be made concerning Steggars's behavior while abroad, which were so satisfactorily answered as to procure a remission of the remainder of his sentence.

Immediately on his return he sought out Messrs. Runnington, and put them fully in possession of all the facts relating to Mr. Quirk's grossly dishonorable conduct in obtaining and acting upon a knowledge of the supposed defect in Mr. Aubrey's title. Upon Mr. Quirk's coming alongside of this gentleman he encountered a fearfully significant glance—and

then Mr. Steggars, in a very pointed manner, crossed over the street for the purpose of avoiding him. Mr. Quirk was so disconcerted by this occurrence that, instead of going on to court, he retraced his steps and arrived at the office just as a clerk was inquiring for him, and who put into his hands the following "*rule*," which had been granted the day before by the Court of King's Bench:

"On reading the Affidavit of JONATHAN STEGGARS, the affidavits of James Parkinson and Charles Runnington, and the paper-writing marked A, all hereunto annexed, It is ORDERED that Caleb Quirk, Gentleman, an attorney of this Honorable Court, do, on Wednesday next, in this present term, show cause why he should not forthwith deliver up to Charles Aubrey, Esquire, the deeds and documents specified in the paper-writing hereto annexed, marked A, *and also why he should not answer the matters contained in the said Affidavits.* Upon the motion of Sir Charles Wolstenholme.

"By the Court."

"O Lord!" exclaimed Mr. Quirk faintly, and, sinking into his chair, inquired for Mr. Gammon; but as usual, he had not been at the office that day. Giving orders to have copies taken immediately of the affidavits mentioned in the rule, Mr. Quirk set off for Mr. Gammon's chambers, but missed that gentleman, who, he learnt, was down at court. The next day Mr. Gammon called at the office, but, Mr. Quirk was absent; on going, however, into the old gentleman's room, Mr. Gammon's eye lit on the above mentioned "rule," and also on the affidavits upon which it had been granted. Having hurriedly glanced over them, he hastily replaced them on the desk as he had found them, and repaired to his own room greatly flustered—resolved to wait for Mr. Quirk's arrival, and appear to be informed by him, for the first time, of the existence of the aforesaid rule and affidavits. While he was really buried in a reverie, with his head resting on one hand and a pen in the other, his countenance miserably pale and harassed, Mr. Quirk burst hastily into his room with the rule and affidavits in his hand.

"O Lord, Gammon! How are you, Gammon?" he stuttered. "Where have you been?" and he grasped very cordially

the cold hand of Mr. Gammon, which did not return the pressure.

"I am not very well, Mr. Quirk; but—you seem agitated! Has anything fresh hap——"

"Fresh?—Ecod, my dear Gammon! Fresh, indeed! Here's a *new* enemy come into the field! D——d if I don't feel going mad! Look, Gammon, look!" and he placed the rule and affidavits in Mr. Gammon's hands and sat down beside him.

"What! *Answer the matters of the affidavit?*" quoth Gammon amazedly. "Why, what have you been doing, Mr. Quirk? And—who upon earth is *Jonathan Steggars?*"

"Steggars, you know—Gammon! You recollect Steggars, of course—eh?" inquired Mr. Quirk with an apprehensive stare. "Steggars; *Steggars*—you know, eh? You don't recollect! Come, come, Gammon!"

"Who is he?" again inquired Gammon sternly.

"O Lud! O Lud!" exclaimed Mr. Quirk despairingly. "What *are* you after, Gammon? You don't intend—it can't be—that you're going to—eh? It's Steggars, you know—we defended him, you know—and he got transported for robbing Parkinson. You recollect how we got hold of Mr. Aubrey's story from him?" While Mr. Quirk was saying all this with feverish impetuosity, Mr. Gammon appeared to be, for the first time, glancing eagerly over the affidavits.

"Why—good heavens, Mr. Quirk!" said he, presently, with a start; "is it possible that these statements can have the slightest foundation in fact?"

"Aye, drat it—that *you* know as well as I do, Gammon," replied Mr. Quirk, with great trepidation. "Come, come, it's rather late in the day to sham Abraham just now."

"Do you venture, Mr. Quirk, to stand there and deliberately charge me with being a party to the grossly dishonorable conduct of which you are here accused upon oath—which, indeed, you admit yourself to have been guilty of?"

"D——d if I don't, Master Gammon!" replied Mr. Quirk, slapping his hand on the table after a long pause, in which he looked completely confounded. "Why, you'll want, by and by, to persuade me that my name isn't Caleb Quirk—why, zounds! you'll drive me mad! You're gone mad yourself—you must be!"

"How dare you insult me, sir, by charging me with

conniving at your infamous and most unprofessional conduct?"

"Why—come! You don't know how we first got scent of the whole thing? Ah, ha! It dropped down from the clouds, I suppose, into our office—O Lud, Lud, Gammon! it isn't kind to leave an old friend in the lurch at such a *horrid* pinch as this!"

"I tell you that I never had the least idea in the world that this wretch Steggars—Faugh! I should have scouted the whole thing! I would rather have retired from the firm. O Mr. Quirk, I am shocked beyond all bounds! What will the profession think of——"

"D—— the profession! What d'ye think I must be just now thinking of *you?* Why, you'd make a dog strike its father!"

"I may have been unfortunate, Mr. Quirk, but I have never been dishonorable—and I would not for the whole creation have my name associated with this infernal transac——"

"O Gammon, Gammon! Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Come—honor among thieves! Be honest for once——"

"Your conduct is so extraordinary, Mr. Quirk, that I must request you to leave my room, sir——"

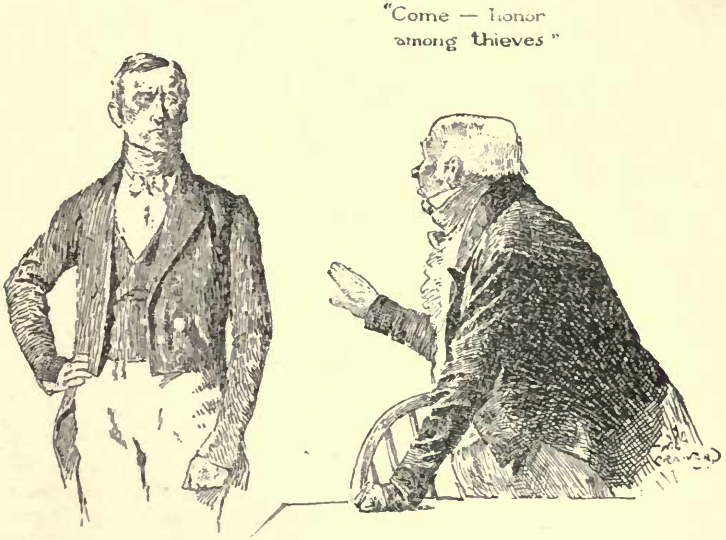
"I sha'n't—it's *mine,* too," quoth Quirk, snapping his fingers with a desperate air.

"Then I will, sir," replied Gammon with a low bow, and, taking up his hat, moved toward the door.

"You sha'n't, Gammon—you mus'n't!" cried Quirk, but in vain—Mr. Gammon had taken his final departure, leaving Mr. Quirk on the very verge of madness.

Half recklessly and half in furtherance of some designs which he was forming, Gammon followed up, on the ensuing morning, his move with Mr. Quirk, by sending to him and to Mr. Snap a formal written notice of his intention to retire from the partnership, in conformity with the provisions of their articles, at the end of a calendar month from the date; and he resolved to take no part at all in the matter to which Mr. Quirk's attention had been so sternly challenged by the Court of the King's Bench—leaving Mr. Quirk to struggle through it as best he might. But what was Mr. Gammon to do? He could not stir a step in any direction for want of money—getting every hour more and more involved and

harassed on this score. The Ecclesiastical suit he had given up, and Mr. Quod had instantly sent in his heavy bill, requiring immediate payment—reminding Mr. Gammon that he had pledged himself to see him paid, whatever might be the issue. Here, again, was an action of ejectment, on a tremendous scale, actually commenced, and being vigorously carried on for the recovery of every acre of the Yatton prop-



erty. Was it to be resisted? Where were the funds? Here he was, again, already a defendant in four indictments, charging fraud and conspiracy—proceedings entailing a most destructive expense.

As for the balance of the bill against Mr. Aubrey, that was melting away hourly in the taxing office; and the undoubted result would be an action against them, at the suit of Mr. Aubrey, for a malicious arrest. Was it possible, thought Gammon, to make the two promissory notes of Mr. Aubrey available, by discontinuing the actions, and indorsing over the notes at a heavy discount? He took an opinion upon the point—which was to the effect that such a

step could not be taken, so as to give any third party a better right against Mr. Aubrey than Mr. Titmouse had.

Mr. Gammon saw that Mr. Aubrey's position was already impregnable, and the notion of a compromise utterly ridiculous.

As for resources of his own, he had none, for he had been exceedingly unfortunate, and had suffered severely through his connection with one or two of the bubble companies of the day. To the vexation occasioned by this direct pecuniary embarrassment, and by the impossibility of retrieving himself by a move in any direction—being, in short, in a complete *deadlock*—were to be added other sources of exquisite anxiety and mortification. To say nothing of the perilous legal and criminal liabilities which he had incurred, the consciousness of his appearing an atrocious liar, and indeed an impostor, in the eyes of the Duke of Tantallan, of the Earl of Dreddlington, of Miss Macspleuchan, of the Aubreys, of *Miss Aubrey*—in fact, of every one who saw or heard of what he had done—stung him almost to madness; considerations of this kind were infinitely more insupportable than all the others by which he was oppressed, put together. In short, it must surely appear, by this time, that the Devil had, in his dismal sport, got his friend, Mr. Gammon, up into a corner.

In a like manner Mr. Titmouse had his lesser troubles—for he was all of a sudden reduced very nearly to the verge of literal starvation. Actions were commenced against him by the three Jews, on his covenants to repay the principal and interest due on the mortgages; half a dozen actions were pending against him on bills of exchange and promissory notes, which he had given for various sums of money, which had been lent him on terms of the most monstrous usury. Scarcely was there a single tradesman in town or country with whom he had ever dealt that had not sued or was not about to sue him. Every article of furniture both at Yatton and at his lodgings—great or small, cabs, harness, horses—all had disappeared; and, but for the protection afforded to his person by privilege of Parliament, he would have been pounced upon by at least a hundred ravenous and infuriate creditors in an instant, and never been seen or heard of any more, except on the occasion of some feeble and vain cry for relief under the Insolvent Debtors' Act.

He had been obliged, on coming up from Yatton, to borrow

five pounds from poor Dr. Tatham!—who, tho infinitely surprised at the application, and greatly inconvenienced by compliance with it, lent him cheerfully the sum he asked for; Titmouse, the little scamp, pledging himself to enclose the Doctor a five-pound note by the first post after his reaching Town. That, however, even had he ever intended giving the matter a thought, he could no more have done than he could have sent Dr. Tatham the miter of the Archbishop of Canterbury; in consequence of which the worthy little doctor was obliged to postpone his long-meditated purchase of a black coat and breeches indefinitely. The morning after Titmouse's return, he betook himself to Saffron Hill, which he reached just as Mr. Quirk and Mr. Snap, deserted by Mr. Gammon, were endeavoring, in great tribulation and terror, to concoct affidavits in answer to those on which the rule in the Court of King's Bench had been obtained. The clerk with a little hesitation, yielding to his importunities, allowed him to go into Mr. Quirk's room.

"O Lud! O Lud!—you—you—you—infernal little villain!" cried out Mr. Quirk, hastily approaching him, pale and stuttering with fury—and, taking him by the collar, turned him by main force out of the room.

"I say!—I say!—Come, sir! I'm a member of——"

"I'll *member* you, you impostor! Get out with you!—get out!"

"So help me—! I'll go to some other attor——" gasped Titmouse, ineffectually struggling against Mr. Quirk.

"Eugh!—Beast!" exclaimed Snap, who kept by the side of Mr. Quirk, ready to give any assistance that might be requisite.

"What have I——eh?—What have I done—demme!—Come, come—hallo! hands off——"

"If ever—if ever—if ever you dare show your cursed little face here—again," sputtered Mr. Quirk, trembling with rage.

"This is a breach of privilege! On my life I'll—I really *will*—I'll complain to the House to-night." Then he hurried to Thavies' Inn, pale as death, and with a tremulous voice inquired for Mr. Gammon; but that gentleman had given special orders to be invariably denied to him. Again and again he called—and was again and again repulsed; and tho he lingered on one or two occasions for an hour at least, in

order to waylay Mr. Gammon, it was in vain. Letter after letter he sent, but with no better effect; and at length the laundress refused to take them in.

Gammon *dared* not see Titmouse; not because he feared Titmouse, but himself.

Get out with you—Get out!

Finding that those whom he had till then imagined bound to consider his interests had, in so unprincipled and ungrateful a manner, deserted him, Titmouse resolved to be true to himself, and bent all the powers of his mind to the contemplation of his present circumstances, and how he should act with advantage. After due and deep reflection, a

very felicitous stroke occurred to him. He did not know the exact state of the question with reference to the right to the possession of Yatton—little dreaming that, in point of fact, Mr. Aubrey was at that moment virtually reinstated in the enjoyment of that fine estate. Now, it occurred to Mr. Titmouse as very probable that his opponent would catch at any fair offer of a compromise, since he—Titmouse—had unquestionably the advantage over him at present, having nine-tenths of the law on his side—viz., *possession;* and if he were to propose to split their differences by making an offer of his hand and heart to Miss Aubrey, it could do no harm, and *might* be attended with the happiest results. In short, I am able to give the reader an exact copy of a letter which, after infinite pains, two days being spent over it, he sent to Miss Aubrey. Here follows that skilful and touching performance:

"House of Comons,
"*Wednesday Nov.*—, 18—.
"(*Private.*)

"Madam,—hoping That this Will not Disapoint you Through Strangeness (which I own Looks Somewhat So) at First sight of my adressing This Epistle to you, to Say Ever since I Have had The unhapiness to be a Widdower Since the Death of Lady Cecilia Titmouse of which There Is Many False accounts Every thing Goes Entirely Wrong (For the present) with me, all For Want of a Lady Which wd feel That Conubial Interest in me That is So delightful In The Married State. I know It is In Dispute whr. yr. respectable Brother or I are Owners of Yatton You See The Law which Gave It me Once *may Give it Me Again and No Mistake*—who knows (in this uncertain Life) whatever Turns Up I can (Betwixt Ourselves) assure You There Is *Something In The Wind* For me wh. dare not Say More Of at this Present. But Supposing You & I shall Hit it what Say You if I should Propose dividing The Estate betwixt Him & Me & *Settling All my Half on You* And as To the Title (wh. at present I Am Next to) what say You To your Brother and I Tossing up for it When It comes for I am Sorry to hear His Lordship is breaking, and I know *Who I shd. Like to see Lady Drelincourt*, oh what a hapiness Only To think Of, As They are dividing very soon (And they *Do* Run It *Uncommon Fine*, But Ministers Must Be Supported or the Country Will Go to

the Devil Dogs) Must Close Begging an answer directed to Me Here, and Subscribe Myself,

"Hnd. and dear Madam,

"Yrs. Most Obediently,

"T. TITMOUSE."

"I hope, Kate, you have not been giving this gentleman encouragement!" quoth Delamere, when he had read the above. It formed a topic of pleasant merriment when they all met at dinner. Mr. Aubrey had returned from Town with important intelligence.

"Mr. Runnington is steadily unraveling," said he, as they sat in unrestrained converse after dinner, "one of the most monstrous tissues of fraud that ever was woven by man! We sometimes imagine that Mr. Gammon must have had in view the securing Yatton for himself! The firm of Messrs. Quirk, Gammon, and Snap are completely overwhelmed with the consequences of their abominable conduct! I understand they have terribly taken in the Jews—to the amount of at least seventy or eighty thousand pounds of hard cash; one of them, it seems, on discovering that he has no security, very nearly succeeded in hanging himself the other day!"

"What's this I see in the paper about a Mr. Tag-rag?" inquired Lord De la Zouch; and Mr. Aubrey told him the miserable condition to which Tag-rag had been reduced by the alleged chicanery of the firm of Quirk, Gammon, and Snap.

"Mr. Runnington seems to be managing matters with great vigor and skill," said his lordship.

"Admirably! admirably! I never in my life saw or heard of such complete success as attends every step he takes against the enemy; he is hourly pressing them nearer and nearer to the verge of the precipice, and cutting off all retreat. They would fight, but they have no funds! Look at the administration suit!" Mr. Aubrey then proceeded to mention two very important circumstances which had transpired since his former visit to town. First, an offer was understood to have come direct from Mr. Gammon, to abandon the defense to the ejectment, on condition of his receiving on behalf of Mr. Titmouse the sum of two thousand pounds; but Mr. Runnington had peremptorily refused to

listen to any proposal of the kind, and the actions were, at that moment, in full progress, with every prospect of there

"I hope Kate, that you have not given this gentleman encouragement"

being no real defense even attempted. The next piece of intelligence was that Messrs. Screw and Son, the solicitors to the Vulture Insurance Company, had called on Messrs. Run-

nington, on learning that they were the solicitors of the party to whom letters of administration had been granted, and intimated that the directors, "taking all the circumstances into their consideration," had determined to offer no further opposition to the payment of the policy on the life of the late Lady Stratton. Thus was Kate no longer a dowerless maiden; having at her absolute disposal a sum of thirteen thousand pounds, in addition to which, in the event of their being restored to the possession of Yatton, she would be in the receipt of the income left her as a charge upon the state by her father; viz., five hundred a year.

While the cheering sunshine of returning prosperity was beaming upon the Aubreys, the sun of that proud and weak old man, the Earl of Dreddlington, was indeed going down in darkness. The proceedings for the immediate recovery of Yatton had attracted far too much of public attention to admit of their being concealed from the Earl, comparatively secluded from the world as he was. But the frightful confirmation of his assertion concerning what had occurred between himself and Mr. Gammon, respecting Titmouse, appeared to make no commensurate impression upon a mind no longer capable of appreciating it. He had been seized by a partial paralysis shortly after the last interview between himself, Mr. Gammon, and the Duke of Tantallan; and it was evident that his reason was failing rapidly. And it was perhaps a merciful dispensation, for it appeared that the cup of his misery and mortification was not even yet full.

That other monstrous fabric of absurdity and fraud, built upon public credulity—The Gunpowder and Freshwater Company—suddenly dropped to pieces, principally on account of its chief architect, Mr. Gammon, being unable to continue that attention and skill by which it had been kept so long in existence. It suddenly exploded, involving everybody concerned in it in ruin.

The houses of Lord Dreddlington, the Duke of Tantallan, and others were besieged by importunate creditors; and at length a general meeting was called, at which resolutions were passed, strongly reflecting upon the Earl of Dreddlington and Mr. Gammon, and directing the solicitor concerned for the rest of the shareholders to file a bill against the Earl and Mr. Gammon for the purpose of compelling them to

pay all the debts incurred by the company. More than this, it was threatened that unless satisfactory proposals were promptly received from or on behalf of the Earl of Dreddlington, he would be proceeded against as a TRADER liable to the bankrupt laws, and a docket forthwith struck against him! Of this crowning indignity impending over his head, the poor old peer was fortunately not conscious, being at that moment resident at Poppleton Hall, in a state not far removed from complete imbecility. The Duke of Tantallan was similarly threatened, and, alarmed and enraged almost to a pitch of madness, resolved to take measures for completely exposing and punishing the individual to whose fraudulent plausibility and sophistries he justly attributed the calamity which had befallen him and the Earl of Dreddlington.

"Out of this nettle danger, I'll yet pluck the flower *safety*," said Mr. Gammon to himself as he sat inside one of the coaches going to Brighton toward the close of the month of November, being on the morning after the explosion of The Gunpowder and Freshwater Company. His chambers were besieged by applicants for admission—Titmouse among them, whose senseless pertinacity, overheard by Gammon as he sat within, while his laundress was being daily worried by Titmouse, several times inflamed him almost up to the point of darting out and splitting open the head of the intruder; old Mr. Quirk also sent daily letters, in a piteous strain, and called besides daily, begging to be reconciled to Gammon; but he sternly turned a deaf ear to all such applications. In order to escape this intolerable persecution, at all events for a while, and, in change of scene and air, unpropitious as was the weather, to recruit his health and spirits, he had determined upon spending a week at Brighton, telling his destination, however, to no one except his old and faithful laundress, and instructing her to say that he was gone, she believed, into Suffolk, but would certainly return to town within a week. On the evening of the third day after his arrival, the London paper, forwarded to him as usual from the neighboring library, contained a paragraph which roused him almost to madness. It was an advertisement that *he* had "ABSCONDED," and offering a reward of £200 to any one who would give information by which he might be "*discovered and apprehended!*"

"*Absconded!*" he exclaimed aloud, starting up, and his eye flaming with fury; "accursed miscreants! I'll quickly undeceive them." Instantly unlocking his paper-case, he sat down and wrote off a letter to the editor of the newspaper, giving his full name and address; most indignantly denying that he had attempted or dreamed of absconding; stating that he should be in London within forty-eight hours; and requiring that an ample apology for the gross insult and libel which had been perpetrated be inserted in the next number of the paper. Then he wrote to his solicitor, Mr. Winnington, and to Mr. Runnington, to a similar effect. Then he secured a place in that night's mail, which was starting for Town at half-past eight o'clock. Greatly to the surprise of his laundress, he made his appearance at his chambers between six and seven o'clock in the morning, rousing her from bed. As soon as his lamp had been lit, he opened his paper-case and wrote the following letter to an old friend of his:

"*Thavies' Inn, Wednesday Morning.*

"DEAR HARTLEY: As I have not missed an annual meeting of our little club for these ten years, I shall be found at my place to-night at nine, to a moment: that is, by the way, if I shall be admitted, after the execrable advertisement concerning me which appeared in yesterday's papers—the writer of which I will give cause, if I can discover him, to repent to the latest day he lives. I came up this morning suddenly, to refute, by my presence and by my acts, the villainous falsehoods about my absconding. *Entre nous*, I am somewhat puzzled, just now, certainly—but never fear! I shall find a way out of the wood yet. Expect me at nine, to a minute.—Yours as ever,

"O. GAMMON.

"HARRY HARTLEY, Esq.
"Kensington Square."

This he sealed and directed, and, requesting his laundress to put it into the office in time for the first post, without fail, he got into bed, and slept for a couple of hours, when he awoke somewhat refreshed, made his toilet as usual, and partook of a light breakfast.

"*You* did not suppose I had absconded, Mrs. Brown, eh?"

he inquired, with a melancholy smile, as she removed his breakfast things.

"No, sir; indeed I did not believe a word of it—you've always been a kind and just master to me, sir—and——" she raised her apron to her eyes and sobbed.

"And I hope long to continue so, Mrs. Brown. By the way, were not your wages due a day or two ago?"

"Oh, yes! sir—but it does not signify, sir, the least; tho on second thoughts—it does, sir; for my little niece is to be taken into the country—she's dying, I fear—and her mother's been out of work for——"

"Here's a ten-pound note, Mrs. Brown," replied Gammon, taking one from his pocket-book; "pay yourself your wages; write me a receipt as usual, and keep the rest on account of the next quarter's wages if it will assist you just now." She took the bank-note with many expressions of thankfulness; and but for her tears, which flowed plentifully, she might have noticed that there was something deadly in the eye of her kind tranquil master. On her retiring, he rose and walked to and fro for a long time, with folded arms, wrapped in profound meditation, from which he was occasionally unpleasantly startled by hearing knocks at his door, and then his laundress assuring the visitor that Mr. Gammon was out of town, but would return on the morrow.

It was a cheerless November day, the snow fluttering lazily through the foggy air; but his room was made snug and cheerful enough, by the large fire which he kept up. Opening his desk, he sat down, about noon, and wrote a very long letter—in the course of which, however, he repeatedly laid down his pen—got up and walked to and fro, heaving deep sighs, and being occasionally exceedingly agitated. At length he concluded the letter, paused some time, then folded it up and sealed it. Then he spent at least two hours in going over all the papers in his desk and cabinet; a considerable number of them he burnt, and replaced and arranged the remainder carefully. Then again he walked to and fro. The cat, a very fine and favorite cat, one which had been several years an inmate of the chambers, attracted his attention, by rubbing against his legs. "Poor puss!" he exclaimed, stroking her fondly on the back; and, after a while, the glossy creature sidled away, as it were reluctantly, from his caress-

ing hand, and lay comfortably coiled up on the hearth-rug, as before.

Again he walked to and fro, absorbed in melancholy reflection for some time, from which he was aroused, about five, by Mrs. Brown bringing in the spare dinner, which, having barely tasted, he soon dismissed, telling Mrs. Brown that he felt a strange shooting pain in his head, but doubted not his being well enough to keep his appointment at the club—as she knew had been his habit for years. He requested her to have his dressing-room ready by quarter to eight, and a coach fetched by eight o'clock precisely; and as soon as she had withdrawn, he sat down and wrote the following letter to the oldest and most devoted personal friend he had in the world:

"My Dear ——: I entreat you, by our long unbroken friendship, to keep the enclosed letter by you for a fortnight; and then, with your own hand, and alone, deliver it to the individual to whom it is addressed. Burn this note to you the instant you shall have read it—and take care that no eye sees the enclosed but *hers*—or all my efforts to secure a *little* provision for her will be frustrated. In the corner of the top drawer of my cabinet will be found, folded up, a document referred to in the enclosed letter—in fact, *my will*—and which I wish *you*, as an old friend, to take the very earliest opportunity of discovering, *accidentally*. You will find the *date* all correct, and *safe*. Call here to-morrow—at any hour you please—and say that you have called to see me, *according to my appointment*. Bear this in mind, by the value you set upon my friendship. Whatever you may then see or hear, be firm and prudent. O. G.

"*Wednesday*."

In this letter he enclosed the long letter already spoken of, and having sealed and directed the whole with elaborate distinctness he threw his cloak round him and went with his packet to the post-office, and with his own hand, after an instant's hesitation, dropped it into the box and returned to his chambers.

Then he took another sheet of paper and wrote thus:

"DEAR VIPER: I doubt whether, after all, there will be a dissolution; but, at any rate, I will perform my promise, and be ready with what you wish for Sunday week.—Yours ever. O. G.

"P.S.—I shall call on you on Saturday."

This he folded up and directed, and proceeded to commence the following:

"*Thavies' Inn, Wednesday.*

"DEAR SIR: I have finally determined to make every sacrifice in order to extricate myself, with honor, from my present embarrassments. You will, therefore, as soon as you get this, please to sell out all my——" Here he laid down his pen; and Mrs. Brown presently announcing that everything was ready in his dressing-room, he thanked her, and proceeded to shave and dress. He was not more than a quarter of an hour over his toilet. He had put on his usual evening dress—his blue body-coat, black trousers, a plain shirt and black stock, and a white waistcoat—scarcely whiter, however, than the face of him that wore it.

"I am going for the coach now, sir," said Mrs. Brown, knocking at the door.

"If you please," he replied briskly and cheerfully—and the instant that he had heard her close the outer door after her, he opened the secret spring drawer in his desk, and took out a very small glass vial, with a glass stopper, over which was tied some bladder to preserve its contents from the air. His face was ghastly pale; his knees trembled; his hands were cold and damp as those of the dead. He took a strong peppermint lozenge from the mantel-piece and chewed it while he removed the stopper from the bottle, which contained about half a dram of the most subtile and potent poison which has been discovered by man—one extinguishing life almost instantaneously, and leaving no trace of its presence except a slight odor, which he had taken the precaution of masking and overpowering with that of the peppermint. He returned to get his hat, which was in his dressing-room; he put it on—and in glancing at the glass, scarcely recognized the ghastly image it reflected.

His object was to complete the deception he intended practising on the insurance company, with whom he had effected

a policy on his life for £2,000—and also to deceive everybody into the notion of his having died suddenly, but naturally. Having stirred up the large red fire, and made a kind of hollow in it, he took out the stopper, and dropped it with the bladder, into the fire; hesitated a moment, glanced fearfully about him, then stepped closer to the fender; uttered aloud the word "*Emma;*" poured the whole of the deadly contents into his mouth, and succeeded in dropping the vial into the very heart of the fire—falling down the next instant on the hearth-rug, oblivous, insensible—*dead.* However it might have been, that the instant after he had done this direful deed, he would have GIVEN THE WHOLE UNIVERSE, had it been his, to have undone what he had done—he had succeeded, *for the present*, in effecting his object.

Poor Mrs. Brown's terror, on discovering her master stretched senseless on the floor—his hat pushed partly down over his eyes in the act of falling—may be imagined. Medical assistance was called in, but only to announce that "the vital spark had fled." It was clearly either apoplexy, said the intelligent medical man, or an organic disease of the heart."

Of this opinion were the coroner and his jury, without hesitation. The deceased had evidently been seized while in the very act of writing to some broker. (Gammon, for all he had written that letter, had no more "*stock*" of any sort than the cat which had witnessed, and been for a moment disturbed by, his death.) Mr. Hartley came, and produced the letter he had received, and spoke of the disappointment they had all felt on account of Mr. Gammon's non-arrival: the other letters—the appointments which he had made for the morrow—the evidence which he had taken care to enable his laundress to give—all these things were decisive—it was really "scarcely a case requiring an inquest"; but as they had been called, they returned a verdict of "Died by the Visitation of God." He was buried a few days afterward in the adjoining churchyard (St. Andrew's), where he lies moldering away quietly enough, certainly; but whether (in the language of the solemn and sublime burial-service which his sorrowful friend had procured to be read over his remains), "*in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternl life, through our Lord Jesus Christ,*" is another and a fearful question.

Succeeded in dropping the vial into the very heart of the fire

His "friend" was faithful and discreet, obeying his injunctions to the letter. The "individual" alluded to in Mr. Gammon's note to him was a beautiful girl whom Mr. Gammon had seduced under a solemn promise of marriage; who was passionately attached to him; whose name he had uttered when on the eve of death; and to whom he had, some six months before, bequeathed the amount of his policy—his will being witnessed by Mary Brown, his housekeeper. Tho his creditors were, of course, entitled to every farthing of the £2,000, out of which he had so artfully swindled the insurance company, they generously allowed her, in consideration of her peculiar and melancholy situation, to receive the sum of £1,000!

There is little more to chronicle concerning the persons in this veracious history. The settlement of the suit about Lady Stratton's will in the Ecclesiastical Court put Mr. Aubrey in possession of Yatton again, and the speedy and, under all the circumstances, fortunate death of the old, broken, crazed, bankrupt Earl of Dreddlington made Mr. Aubrey Lord Drelincourt.

When poor Mr. Titmouse lost his immunity from arrest on the dissolution of Parliament he was immediately thrown into prison by the infuriated money-lenders. After serving a term of some eighteen months he was released through the operations of the Bankruptcy Act. His dissipation and his misfortunes had shattered the little mind he originally possessed. Epilepsy was succeeded by a harmless form of lunacy, and the poor, wretched little man dragged out a vacant, if peaceful, existence for a few years in a private asylum at the charges of Lord Drelincourt.

Mr. Quirk, completely broken by the death of Gammon and the accumulation of difficulties in which his daring and villainous partner had plunged the firm, speedily departed this life. Before he died, however, he had the satisfaction—if such it was—of seeing his daughter Dora united in matrimony to the enterprising Mr. Snap—a sad end, indeed, to all his dreams!

EPILOGUE

IN WHICH IS HEARD THE SOUND OF WEDDING BELLS

HERE is a heavenly morning in June, and as Catherine Aubrey hath passed a strange, restless night, she is at length closing her eyes in sleep; nothing is to be heard stirring, save yonder lark that is carrying his song higher and higher out of hearing every moment, and she will sleep for a while undisturbed.

* * * * * * *

But *now*, rise, Kate! rise! It is your wedding morning! Early tho it be, here are your fair bridesmaids seeking admittance, to deck you in your bridal robes! Sweet Kate, why turn so pale and tremble so violently? Cannot these three beautiful girls, who, like the Graces, are arraying you as becomes your loveliness, with all their innocent arts and archness provoke one smile on your pale cheek? Weep, then, if such be your humor; for it is the overflowing of joy, and will relieve your heart!—But hasten! hasten! your lover is below, impatient to clasp you in his arms! The maids of the village have been up with the sun gathering sweet flowers to scatter on your way to the altar! Hark how merrily ring the bells of Yatton church!—Nearer and nearer comes the hour which can not be delayed; and why, blushing and trembling maiden, should you dread its approach? Hark—carriage after carriage is coming crashing up to the Hall!—Now your maidens are placing on your beautiful brow the orange blossoms—and a long flowing graceful veil shall conceal your blushes!—Now, at length, she descends—and sinks into the arms of a fond and noble brother, whose heart is too full for speech, as is that of her sister! Shrink not, my beauteous Kate, from your lover, who approaches you, see how tenderly and delicately! Is he not one whom a maiden may be proud of? See the troops of friends that are waiting to attend you and do you honor! Everywhere that the eye looks are glistening gay wedding-favors, emblems of

innocence and joy. Come, Kate—your brother waits; you go with *him* to church, but you will come back with ANOTHER! Dr. Tatham, the venerable minister of God, that loves you as a father, is awaiting your arrival! What a brilliant throng is in that little church!

Now her beautiful form is standing at the altar, beside her manly lover, and the solemn ceremony has commenced which is to unite, with Heaven's awful sanction, these two young and happy and virtuous hearts!

'Tis done! Kate Aubrey! Kate Aubrey, where are you? She is no more—but MRS. DELAMERE is sitting blushing and sobbing beside her husband, he elate with pride and fondness, as they drive rapidly back to the Hall. In vain glances her eye at that splendid banquet, as it shrinks also timidly from the glittering array of guests seated around it —and she soon retires with her maidens to prepare for her agitating journey!

Well—they are gone! My pure and lovely Kate is gone! 'Tis hard to part with her! But blessings attend her! Blessings attend you both! You cannot forget dear YATTON, where all that is virtuous and noble will ever with open arms receive you.

And now, dear friends! farewell for many a day!
If e'er we meet again, I cannot say.
Together have we travel'd two long years,
And mingled sometimes smiles, and sometimes tears!
Now droops my weary hand, and swells my heart—
I fear, good friends! we must forever part.
Forgive my many faults! and say of me,
He hath *meant* well, who writ this history.

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